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GOLD of YESTERDAY

NINE out of ten people would have called me a fool. The tenth would have done exactly as I did. You would have yourself, if you'd been needing a job. I was not broke, but badly bent, that morning. I had been jerking abalone off the bottom of the sea with a Ford spring-leaf, which is some job. A good one, too, only I got into a scrap with the Greeks who ran the fishing outfit and quit to avoid being fired. So here I stood on the Merrit & Scott wharf, a perfectly good diver out of a job, sniffing in the San Pedro waterfront smells and watching the gold come ashore from the *Homer*.

Gold by the bar, by the bucket—all out of the old *Ohio* wreck down off the Mexican coast. Two of the salvage divers were talking to me about it, as we watched the golden bars pile up, when I heard my name called—

"Hey, Kilraine!"

"Cap Varnum wants you," said one of the divers. "Go get a gold bar for a souvenir."

Varnum, the skipper of this old sal-ge craft, stood at one side, talking stranger and waving at me. I and nodded.

ine, meet Cap'n Fowler!" he said. "I've recommended you. Well, Cap'n, I must get back on the job. Glad to have met you. Come aboard any time."

Varnum hastily joined the crowd of police and company men. I met a crushing grip from Fowler. His powerful, rounded shoulders, cropped head and

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Rodomont"

heavy, square features were eloquent of massive strength and none too pleasant disposition. Then he nodded at me.

"What salary do you want?" he demanded without preamble.

"Depends on the length of the job," I said rather curtly. If he was that sort, I could certainly meet him on his own ground and then some.

"Maybe a month, maybe a year," he returned. "Deepwater job, on a hulk. The best outfit obtainable, but no compression chamber. Two hundred feet down. I'll give you five per cent of the gross, or four hundred a month. The gross may run big; chances are it will not."

"Five per cent," I said promptly, "and a hundred in advance."

"Done." Fowler pulled out a wallet and counted off real money. "Come aboard tonight; we're leaving at once. The *Esmeralda*, by the No. 1 fireboat."

"I'll be there for supper," I said.

With a wave of his hand, Fowler strode off to a car that was waiting for him just beyond the piles of salvage scrap by the plate yard. And then an odd thing happened.

Pappados showed up from the entrance gate—Pappados in person, that greasy rascal who should have been over in Fish Harbor counting his catch. He still had a black eye, which I had given him. He probably got past the gate through having a master's ticket, even if it was only for his lousy fish boat.

My first thought was that he was after me. But he never so much as

looked my way. He strode up to Captain Fowler, waved his arms and talked rapidly. Pappados was excited about something. I could not hear what was said, but I saw what happened. Fowler hit the Greek under the jaw, then climbed into his hired car, and the driver went away from there.

Pappados had gone sprawling; and, let me tell you, that means something. He was one hard man, all muscle and a lot of it. When I gave him that shiner he hit me back twice as hard. But Fowler, right off the reel, knocked him down and mighty near knocked him out. I gained a healthy respect for Captain Fowler then and there. Pappados got up and departed.

Nobody else had seen or noticed the occurrence. I rejoined the crowd, wondering if I had been a fool. I had not the least idea where or what the job was. Fowler's abruptness had irritated me, and my readiness to plunge must have surprised him. I understood that Captain Varnum had answered thoroughly for me.

After the gold bars had gone I went up to Varnum and thanked him for landing the job.

"I suppose Fowler's a friend of yours?" I went on.

"Never heard of him before," said Varnum. "He wanted a good diver for deep work."

"He got one," I said. "He's going out with the *Esmeralda* tonight."

"That old scow?" Varnum whistled and rubbed the scar on his cheek. "Well, she's solid enough to go to the pole. Good luck!"

So I started for town.

Across the channel on the mud flats were lined up the rum runners, most of them in from a trip the previous night. Beyond lay ships on every side—fine ships, rotten ships, oil burners, four-masters. Some were beached, others were tended and watched. Here at [illegible]inal Island, the hub of all the [illegible]ton, San Pedro and Los An[illegible]ffic, could be found anything from beached ocean liners to square-rigged barks still in service.

ONCE across the ferry, I went to my lodgings in a cheap hotel, paid up my bill and got my few belongings together. There was just time to get back to the island and get aboard the *Esmeralda* without haste.

Sight of those gold bars Varnum had landed started my imagination running. That was my chief trouble—imagination. A diver can not have it and get very far. I was no great expert, but good enough.

Varnum had cleaned up a fortune for his owners on this one salvage job. There were other fortunes waiting up and down the coast, if one could only catch on to them. Had Fowler caught on to something? Perhaps. Very likely he was going out to fish for sunken booze. Everybody up and down the coast has some sort of sunken treasure gossip in his head. Bill Williams used to talk about a Spanish galleon off Alamitos. I knew, myself, where there was a full load of the finest wines and liquors on the bottom off Halfmoon Bay.

Running over such reflections, I started out of the hotel and almost bumped into Nick Crock, which was as close to his name as we ever got. He was a partner of Pappados, and had command of the *Sirena*, the firm's deep sea craft.

"Why, hello," he cried with a wide grin, and stuck out his hand at me. "How are you, Larry?"

"Hello, Nick," I said, without too much warmth. "I'm still sore from that crack you landed in my ribs.."

"Good," he said cheerfully. "Me, too, from that jab in the face. Two teeth gone, Larry. Damn you! Now I come to get you back on the job."

"You what?" I exclaimed, staring at him. I knew perfectly well he hated the very sight of me—this big, heavy-jawed, hairy-thatched Greek.

"Sure," he replied cordially, and clap-

ped me on the shoulder. "We fish up that rum boat got sunk last year. We need you."

"Yes?" I said. "That proves it's something else. No thanks, Nick; I got a job today and I don't need one with you."

"You got a job?" He scowled at me. "Where?"

"Manicuring airplanes over at the airport," I said. "And, by the way, when you see Pappados again, ask him who knocked him head over heels at the salvage wharf this afternoon. So long."

I swung my duffle-bag over my shoulder and walked away, leaving Nick Crock glaring after me with a scowl on his ugly face.

Why had he come after me? Not because he loved me or wanted me; simply because he needed me. Not for abalone jerking, either. Probably for some real deep work. Not many deepwater men were lying around loose just then. I was not really one myself, but I made a bluff at it and was always ready to try anything — as Captain Varnum well knew.

I went up to where the old *Esmeralda* was moored, beyond the fireboat berth at one side of the lumber yard.

Once she had been a Mexican gunboat. She was still under the Mexican flag, and had been lying up here for months with all sorts of debts piling up against her. Now, however, I was astonished to find her looking spry, if not fresh. At least she was clean, and steam was up, to judge by the smoke pouring from her funnel.

I came aboard, and was met by Fowler, who took me to a stuffy berth aft. There the mate was just stowing away his stuff. He was a lean, pale, gangling fellow named Olsen, and had a very decent look—a mild-mannered sort. I liked him at once. Fowler told us to join him in ten minutes for mess, then departed. Olsen gave me a grin.

"Diver, huh? What are you going to dive after?"

"You ought to know," I said.

"So should you, Kilraine. You don't?"

I laughed, and he chimed in. He was going it blind, too, and his wife had a month's advance wages to keep her from starving.

"You have not seen the men?" he asked. I shook my head. "Well—" he grimaced, dropping his voice—"you're a big fellow; you're stout; look like you could handle yourself. Hard eye and a hard jaw. But this gang we have aboard —whew! Looks like Fowler just signed on plain thugs, and a few fancy ones. Well, let's go to supper. If the grub's good, we can pass over a lot of things."

The grub was good. Lucky it was, for we had a lot of things to pass over.

THE eight men in the crew were a hard lot, but I did not see much of them until morning. By then we were standing down the coast. The *Esmeralda* was evidently going back to Mexico.

Beyond keeping up steam, there was no work done. Fowler had no interest in keeping the old hooker shipshape, it seemed. So the men loafed, drank, gambled and did as they pleased. The engineer was a one-legged veteran who had hopped around San Pedro for years, a chap named Maclaren, not so old either. He was about the only other American in the lot.

Those eight had been recruited from Fish Harbor, obviously. Three were Slavs, two were Filipinos, and the other three seemed to be just mixtures. They were hard workers in a pinch, hard fighters at all times, and plain bad. Olsen said to me that every last one looked like a murderer or worse, and that was true.

I have found, however, that you can not always go by looks. As long as Olsen agreed to help Fowler tend lines for me, I was satisfied.

Nosing around, I discovered that none of the men was aware of our objective. They proved as much in ing it over among themselve had cleared for Ensenada

nothing. He, and he alone, knew where we were going and why. And he did not talk.

He had put money into it, too. The grub was good enough, and what with coal, charter and other expenses, and the diving outfit, everything must have cost a pretty penny. I did not see the outfit at once; but the two big brass-bound ash chests that were firmly lashed aft looked like the latest Morse output. The rental must have come high.

Early that afternoon I was at the rail when Antonio, one of the three mixed bloods, came and stood beside me. He was mostly Italian, I think; spoke English, but had a dark, handsome hawk-face with mighty evil eyes.

"You watch those boat, eh?" He nodded toward two fishing craft I had been watching, a couple of miles away. "They come back to Pedro from the south. You know them, maybe?"

"Sure," I said. "Do you?"

He nodded and showed white teeth in a grin.

"Pappados, eh? Two of his boats. You're the feller had a fight with him and Nick Crock, I hear."

"What's that?" exploded a voice behind us. It was Fowler, who stood glaring. "Kilraine, you had a fight with Pappados?"

I turned, leaned on the rail and eyed him with a grin.

"Sure, I worked for him until the other day. But I didn't do half to him what you did with one turn of the wrist."

Fowler grunted.

"Saw that, did you? Antonio, where'd you hear about Kilraine?"

"It's all over the waterfront, Cap," said Antonio, giving me a grin. "I hear he licked Pappados and Nick too, or durned near. Those fellers talk a lot, anyhow."

Fowler jerked his head at me, and I followed aft. Antonio looked after us. His swarthy face wore a queer expression. I thought nothing of it at the time.

The round stern, with a box seat, was unoccupied, and Fowler motioned me to sit down. He chewed an unlighted cigar for a moment, then turned to me.

"How long you been working for Pappados?"

"Six weeks," I told him.

"Hm! Then you took the place of a man named Swenson?"

"Yes." I was surprised at this, having figured Fowler as a stranger in these parts. "Yes, Swenson had a poor outfit, went down too deep and died in a San Diego hospital the same day they got him in. There were conflicting stories told about it. Pappados got a brand new outfit before I signed on, though."

Fowler nodded his head as if he knew all that.

"Swenson was a relative of mine," he said. "I been living in San Diego for the last year, retired. I was in the hospital with him when he died. Lemme tell you what happened: Swenson was fishing an abalone bed in forty foot of water. This was right on the edge of a big drop, only he didn't know it till too late. He worked a bit deeper, found some big ones and got them. Then something happened; a swirling current, he thought, maybe a big fish going past. It knocked him galley west. He went over the drop. Them durned Greeks didn't have the lines hauled in. Swenson dropped like a bat out of hell. Then they got scared and hauled him up quick. That finished him."

"I heard some talk about it," I said. "Nick Crock always tended the lines, with a good man on the pumps. Nick never heard of decompression tables, though. I had to make the rules for him. He's always worked in forty to fifty foot, it seems, where decompression isn't needed very often. Pappados wanted me to work deeper, but I wouldn't for that reason."

"Well—" Fowler nodded again—"I know the decompression tables by heart, so don't worry. When Swenson went over the edge of that drop he saw some-

thing. All clear water there, he said. No mud; rock bottom. And down underneath him was a wreck, broke in two, lying slap against the side of the precipice. He described her to me plain before he died. I worked like a dog for a month on records, and then I got her placed, from the description. Old fashioned side-paddle steamer. She was the *City of Bangor*—a craft that left San Francisco in August of 1851, touched at San Diego and was never heard of again. Put that in your pipe!"

"What of it?" I asked.

He did not speak at once, but chewed on his cigar and eyed me with a savage expression. I did not pretend to like Fowler, and probably he found me a bit too independent to suit him, but each of us felt the other to be reliable, I think.

"Gold," he said. "A whopping shipment of gold from the mines, melted into bars and sent to New York. Close to a million; the exact amount isn't known. It was stowed in iron chests, and these were all stowed aft in a sort of lazaret slap in the stern."

I drew a deep breath. So this was it! Gold of '49!

"What d'you think of it?" he demanded bluntly.

"Sounds fishy," I said. "A dozen things against it. For one, can you find the spot?"

"Within a hundred feet." Fowler glared at me exultantly. "That drop is charted. Swenson knew the exact spot. Swenson was a navigator. The coast was only a mile off. He had his bearings to a dot. The only trouble is, Pappados can find it also! Swenson babbled when they brought him up."

"How much does Pappados know?" I demanded. "He wasn't with the outfit that trip. Nick Crock was in charge."

"They know Swenson found a ship there. They've been back, but can't get any one to go down deep. Then they heard about me, guessed that I had learned something definite and came after me. They knew I wouldn't be outfitting this lousy craft otherwise. I gave Pappados his answer today."

"And Nick tried to hire me back today," I added.

This gave him a jolt. He threw away the cigar and stared.

"What? When was this?"

I told him about it. Fowler's eyes glittered. They were dark eyes, surly eyes, full of strength and badness; nothing weak or mean or underhand about them. Fowler was the same way. Not pretty, not likable, but all man.

"Well, that means they'll be along," he said, and looked at me. "What do you say? Do you go through with it? Mexican waters, you know. Time to back out now if you like."

Mexican waters, sure. That meant anything could happen and probably would.

"You big, glass-eyed stiff, I'll be on the job when you've run for cover!" I said, and he grinned.

His hand went out.

"Shake on it, Kilraine! So Pappados will give us a fight, eh?"

"You knew that when you hired this crew," I told him flatly. He only grinned again and stalked away, probably to find Olsen and let him in on the secret.

I LOOKED over the rail at the cool green water, knew I was all sorts of a fool, and enjoyed the sensation. The man who has never been a fool has never really lived. There's a gamble in it, a real gamble and not a sure-thing play. If you can be a fool and get away with it you've done something.

Same here. There was trouble ahead, and if any occurred under the surface, I would be the goat; only a fool would have gone ahead. Mexican waters, to boot. Still, Fowler was a hard-headed man. He was sold on the notion of that gold ship, and he had sold me on it. My imagination was fired by the thought of that old side-paddle gold ship lying there securely and waiting for us

by the thought of Fowler's being able to find the exact spot.

A real sea captain always looks like a bang-up magician to me, anyhow.

On top of everything else was my five per cent of the gross. The yarn looked fishy, it was improbable, and therefore might be true. Captain Varnum had fetched in a good half-million or more in that salvage job, all in gold bars. I had seen them. If we landed as much, then I had a stake for life.

But Varnum's job had taken weeks and months, breaking into a steel ship, blasting into the steel strong-room and so forth. If there was anything in that eighty-year-old wooden hulk, rotten with close to a century of water, we'd jerk it out in one crack.

That same night Antonio put up a proposition to me.

I was sitting alone in the stern, smoking and watching the moonlight on our wake, when his lithe, graceful figure swaggered up. A match flared as he lighted a cigaret.

"So we are going after gold, Kilraine?"

"How do you know that?" I answered.

He laughed silkily.

"Pouf! Every one knows it; the cap'n told us just now. And there may be trouble with those Pappados, eh? Do you know why the cap'n hired me, Kilraine?"

"For your good looks, sure," I returned sarcastically.

He laughed again.

"No. Because I have work with underwater charges. Me, I am expert at that. I have brought what we need—wire, batteries, explosive. You will set the charge, and me, I will explode it after I arrange it. Now, Kilraine, suppose Pappados comes with another diver, eh?"

"He may and he may not," I said. "If he does, there won't be any fighting under water, let me tell you. I'll do mine up in the fresh air."

"Maybe we do better," said Antonio "We say nothing to the cap'n, I fix up a charge, and when we see Pappados I send it down. You leave it there, say nothing. Then when Pappados sends down a diver—*boom!* Nobody knows what happen."

It made me actually sick for a minute.

"Lay off," I said curtly.

But he would not listen.

"Let me tell you how beautiful, how perfect it work," he went on.

"I told you once to lay off," I said. "Forget it! And I mean it, you murdering devil!"

When I looked into his face he took a step backward. He saw I meant it, all right.

"Oh, very well, very well!" he said hurriedly. "It is forget, my friend. Good night."

Later I was talking to Olsen and mentioned what Antonio had said.

"Yeah," said the mate. "Fowler told all hands about the gold. Funny thing, though, he didn't mention Pappados or any trouble. How did Antonio know about that?"

I wondered. But, being a fool, I paid no more attention to it.

WE LAY a mile off the desolate, bleak, hilly desert that was the Lower California coast, while Fowler and Olsen worked furiously to locate the exact spot of the wreck.

It took them a good half day, sighting shore bearings, figuring on charts and using the hand lead while the old craft wheezed about. Both of them took noon sights, figured some more, and an hour later we struck the sudden drop with the lead. Then Fowler corrected the position by shore bearings, and we anchored.

He came to where I was overhauling the gear and announced triumphantly that we were close to the wreck itself and that I could go down at once.

"I will like hell!" I told him flatly. "This gear has to be overhauled, then I want to see some practice on the pumps and make sure some of you can read the gage. Why the devil didn't you

get a suit with a telephone attachment?"

He gawked at me, half angry.

"I could not get one," he said. "This is the very latest."

"True; but you could have got a telephone, and all helmets are made for telephone attachment," I snapped. "What do you mean, up to date? This is fifty years behind the times, even if it is the very latest. You need a telephone for work in two hundred feet, you fool!"

"Look here, Kilraine, mind your tongue to me!" he said, suddenly red with anger.

"To hell with you!" I told him. "Who's risking his life, you or me? You were wrong, and you know it. So was I, not to make sure about the telephone before we started. Anyhow, it's elegant gear and brand new. This black air hose proves it—the very latest. Always been white before. And laced legs, too. And the new helmet with big lights and the improved escape valve. Yes, I can't find anything wrong except the missing telephone, damn it!"

Fowler grunted. One of the men, who had been helping me lay out the lines, looked from one to the other of us, and I suddenly saw why Fowler was so furious. I went up to the man and tapped his shoulder.

"None of your looks," I told him. "I'm no ship's officer. I can talk up to the cap'n and he has to like it; but don't you pass on the word and start the notion that all hands can do the same. Get me?"

He nodded, mumbled something and went forward.

"My Lord, but you are a fool!" said Fowler, staring at me.

I grinned at him.

"That makes us even, then. Why don't you lash this pump-chest aft in the stern? I can go down best from there, by Jacob's ladder, on account of the overhang. Rig a descent line, well weighted, and once in the water I'll go down by that. Pick a couple of men for the pumps, see that they know their business, and in the morning we'll start work. And I want some olive oil, too."

"We probably have some," said Fowler. "What for?"

"To grease the gaskets and so forth. Any other kind makes a diver sick."

Come to find out, the skipper knew nothing about diving, but had studied it earnestly and resolutely for the past month. He knew it by theory, and that was all. However, realizing that at two hundred feet he was gambling with a diver's life, he had neglected nothing. Like learning the decompression tables by heart, which was essential. If he didn't haul me up in the right manner I would go the way of Swenson.

An hour after sunrise next morning we went to work. Having eaten no breakfast, I was none too amiable, and Fowler and I spat back and forth. Olsen was worried about sharks.

"They're thick in these waters, Kilraine," he said anxiously. "If one shows up, what'll we do?"

"Nothing," I told him, "unless I give the emergency signal; then haul up, leave me at the surface until you take care of the shark, and drop me again for decompression. The only danger is that the shark might bite through the lines, but that's improbable. With a knife, I'm safe enough."

Olsen gawked.

"But what if he knocks you off your feet?"

"Rubbish!" I pointed to the laced-up suit. "There's no air in these pants, like there was in the old-fashioned diving dresses. I can stand on my head, literally, and have no trouble coming erect. Now, Cap'n, let's get the signals straight."

We did so, for each working diver usually prefers to arrange his own signal code.

Satisfied that the pumps were going smoothly, I put on the weights and then the helmet. It was the new type with overhead light and a boss for snapping in the lines, instead of having them made fast directly to the breastplate. It

would be cold down at that depth, and I was thankful that the outfit included woolens and mittens.

I went down the ladder into the water, took over the weighted line, waved my hand to show everything was right, and went down fast. The old notion that a diver must go down slowly is all bosh; the faster the better, thanks to the absorption of nitrogen.

Without incident, I struck the bottom. We were over the drop, not over the abalone shelf, and, as soon as I signaled down, Fowler came back with the signals of all well. Off I went. There was a heavy current, but almost no marine growth. This was because of the current which swept along that great submerged rock wall.

The descent line was furnished with two other lines—one for finding my way back to it; the other for sending up a buoy as soon as I found the wreck. This was no easy matter. There was light enough down there, and after five minutes I located the precipice, a huge naked wall of jagged rock, kept clean of algae by the current. This made walking difficult, too.

My one real fear was of morays, for these vicious eels are worse than sharks by a good deal. But I saw none and breathed more easily.

As I was working in a hundred and ninety feet—the lead had told us that—I had at the outside thirty minutes in which to stay down—less if possible. I could stay an hour if I wanted, but this would mean an ascent of over two hours, with stops at eight different stages, and big chances at that. If I remained only twenty minutes, I must take nearly an hour in the ascent. And time was figured from my entering the water, not from when I reached the bottom. Fowler, watch in hand, would signal me every fifteen minutes.

Aside from all tables and rules, my prime object was to stay down as short a time as possible, thus absorbing less nitrogen and becoming less liable to sickness.

FISH in plenty, scattered boulders in plenty, but there was very little submarine growth, almost no sand at all. That steady current scoured these rocks beautifully. To work on this unobstructed, clear ocean floor was a rare privilege. The light would be better at noon, with the sun directly overhead, but it was quite good enough as it was. All I wanted was to locate the wreck.

Working to the left along the face of the precipice, I discerned a shadowy mass, like a cluster of enormous rocks, and approached. This was exactly what it was—several fragments of rock. And among them, reaching far up into the depths of my green heaven, was the wreck.

There were masses of algae and other marine growth, protected from the current by the wreck and the rocks, and much sand had collected. I made fast the buoy line to a small rock fragment, signaled that I had found the wreck, then examined the situation quickly.

There, held high on the rock fragments, was the whole forward part of the hulk. She had broken in two just abaft the engines and side-paddles. A huge mass of stuff was probably the engines. The boiler must have blown up and broken her. The stern portion, however, lay right before me, no larger than one of the huge rocks beyond. And the whole stern was intact. So covered was the old hulk with weed, barnacles and all sorts of growth, that only the general outline was left.

I signaled to be drawn up. Twelve minutes down, as it proved.

On that ascent of an hour I had plenty of time to figure out everything. The stern portion of the wreck lay deck down, the break almost against the rock precipice, rudder and stern-post outward. My only chance of getting into her, therefore, was to break her up with a charge or two which would not damage the chests.

"Cap'n, you don't know how lucky you are!" I said to Fowler when at last

I was lying on deck, the cook bringing me some coffee and grub. "This job is a diver's paradise; it's the sort of thing you dream about which never happens. Varnum would go crazy if he ever got a chance at work like this! You just have to pick up the stuff and go home. Nothing to do except plant the charges. Why, if we had Varnum's equipment and tackle here, we could bring up that whole stern portion like a shot."

"The gold is enough," growled Fowler, wiping sweat from his cheeks. He was excited, and no wonder. "That buoy is only a hundred feet from here. We'll shift position and get the charges ready. How soon can you go down again?"

"Not until noon," I said. "And I want you at that battery key yourself—not Antonio."

"Right," said Fowler.

I did not tell him why. Somehow, the memory of Antonio's words lingered uneasily with me, but I called myself a fool for my pains. The man had no reason to wish me any ill or to blow me up; quite the contrary, in fact, since if I were killed there would be no gold and consequently no bonus for him.

And yet it worried me. So easy to put down one of those rubber-encased wires without any one's observing it! As I lay there, waiting for my breakfast, the possibility worried me more and more. It was on my nerves.

My breakfast came. So did Olsen, who took a look at me, lighted a cigaret and squatted down beside me.

"What's the matter, Kilraine? You've got a damned queer look in your eye."

I told him. He frowned at me and shook his head.

"Nerves, sure enough. Get rid of it, man! Why, nobody would dare murder you that way—"

"I didn't say they would, but don't make me laugh," I rejoined angrily. "Of course they would. Nothing to show, no corpse left. It would be ideal!"

"You are in a bad way," he said. "Listen, now. I know Antonio. He's been in charge of the blasting work on those new caissons over at the harbor head; he's an expert."

"So he told me," I retorted grimly. "I know I'm a fool, Olsen; but I'd like you to keep an eye on him all the same."

"Sure, sure," he said soothingly, and I knew right off he took no stock in my fancies. Nor did I myself, as a matter of fact. It was plain nerves, but worried me. "You take it easy, and forget all this business. Lay those charges, and the key won't be touched until you're up here again and out of your suit."

I knew it would not be. I was angry at my own silly fears. So I nodded, and we said no more on the subject.

NOON. There was a long, slow swell.

The old *Esmeralda* rocked gently as I got into my suit. Antonio had done his work. Two charges were lowered at the ends of waterproof wire and were awaiting me on the bottom.

While Olsen helped me dress, Fowler was growling away and watching the horizon.

"Don't understand it!" I heard him say. "Those chaps should have been after us long ago. Don't like this waiting. Let 'em come, have a scrap and be done with it. That's my motto. They were keen enough back there at Pedro. What's held 'em up?"

"Where's our friend Antonio now?" I muttered to Olsen.

He looked forward.

"Eating. He and the cook are up for'ard stowing away grub."

Fowler swung around.

"Kilraine, how long will you be down?"

"Not over ten minutes, if I can help it," I told him. "That'll cut short the decompression to thirty mintes."

He nodded.

"Only ten on the last stage, eh? Good. Remember those charges will work down, so blow out her whole sternpost if you can. You'll not go right

down again?"

"Not me. Not for two hours."

He scowled, but nodded.

As we had moved our position directly over the buoy and wreck, I had only to go straight down the descent line. Of one thing I was confident. No other charge and wire had been put over the side, and nobody would touch that battery until I was up again. Now I laughed at the senseless fears which had rushed on me, but just the same I meant to take all precautions.

"Everything's clear," said Olsen as I slipped the weights into place. "Not a sign of shark, and no fish about to draw 'em. Go ahead, and good luck!"

He put on the helmet, gave it the eighth turn that fastened it, and locked it there. The face-plate slammed shut and was locked. The pumps were clicking regularly, two men at them, and Fowler was ready to take the lines. I went down the ladder, waved my hand, took over the descent line and went down fast.

Too much air; I shoved my head against the cock of the escape valve and let some out. Down and down I went. It was much clearer now than earlier in the day. Details were distinct and not foggy. The fish that flitted away before my descent were clear cut, lovely things. A small octopus went darting in front of me, shooting itself along with its powerful suction pump at incredible speed. Then the bottom appeared. I signaled, landed lightly and caught hold of the wires with their attached bundles. There was no need of a leading line, as I could not miss my descent rope.

Oddly enough, all worry had left me now. Even if anything went wrong, at the emergency signal Fowler would jerk me up to fifty feet before pausing for decompression. I was thinking of this as I came to the stern of the wreck and started to work.

Probably in hitting bottom, or pounding against the rocky precipice while coming down, she had been badly battered. Not enough to break her up, but enough to leave me plenty of gaping crevices for my charges.

I got one placed and was clambering up to place the second when I paused suddenly. Through the top light I saw something dark overhead. A huge streak that moved lazily and gave my lines a flick. It was a shark. Not a big one, not over a fifteen-footer, but to me he looked enormous.

Getting out my knife, I stood ready. The shark did not come down to me, however. He was curious about my lines, and flickered around them, then was gone with a tremendous rush. He would be back, of course.

"Trouble on the way up, eh?" I thought. "Well, here's hoping he hangs around here until those charges go off."

I went ahead and got the second charge placed. They had not seen the shark from above, for Fowler made no signal. The job finished, I clambered off the hull and was just starting toward my line when I saw something else. I was watching the skyline pretty sharply.

Down through the water, straight as a plummet, was dropping something large and fairly heavy, to judge from its speed. What it was, I could not make out, for the best of reasons. I had no time. Everything happened in the flash of an instant. I saw the thing dropping, and at the same time I felt the emergency signal from Fowler. I answered it.

Then came a rush of water, the swift flicker of a long shape overhead—then that shark had come and gone. He gobbled that falling object with one snap of his huge jaws, took it on the wing, so to speak, and was off out of sight.

This took place just as I went shooting upward. I hoped fervently that the shark would not return and take me on the fly also; then I came to a pause, probably at the fifty-foot stage. A moment later an object came down — a slate with a message. On it Fowler had scrawled:

Boat coming. Bringing you up.

Pappados, no doubt.

With the pencil attached to the slate, I scribbled an O.K, mentioned the shark and sent it up. Then I was taken on to the next stage and halted. Three minutes there. . .

A terrific shock as something smashed at me.

My first thought was that one of the charges had gone off. A solid wall of water must have hit me; I was sent whirling like a top, clear off my descent line, dangling through the water like a plummet on a string. I swung back, grabbed at the line and caught it, and was presently going on to the next stage. But, for a minute, I was pretty nearly out.

Nothing else happened. At the seven-minute stage, next to the last, the slate came down.

The message read:

What was it?

I snorted and caught up the pencil.

I'm asking you!

was my reply, and up it went. The slate did not come down again.

The concussion had done me no damage. The shark did not return. At the ten-minute and last stage, however, several dead fish came drifting past on the current, proving that there had been some explosion. I could only wait in patience, determining to have a settlement with somebody for that premature crash.

And yet, I reflected, Fowler must have known it if the depth charges had gone off.

At last I broke water, groped for the Jacob's ladder and emerged in the sunlight. Olsen gave me a hand over the rail. He and the two men at the pumps were now alone in the stern. I saw the others on a dead run, heading forward.

Olsen loosened the nut on my face plate and flung it open.

"All right?" he yelled at me, his features pale and anxious.

"Sure," I returned.

He grabbed for the helmet, threw off the lock, and the next instant my head was free. Then I realized that something was happening.

Fowler and the other men were ranged along the port rail, forward, and Fowler was hurling curses at the *Sirena*. There she was, Pappados's pride, within a hundred feet of us. I saw Pappados standing in her stern, other men at her rail. Solid, white, twin-motored, with refrigeration and every capacity for tons of fish, she looked like business.

Two of her men leaped on the rail, flung down a line, and I saw a swimmer almost alongside her.

"What's going on?" I asked Olsen.

"Damned if I know," he answered. "Fowler thought they were going to lay aboard us."

"Hey! It's Antonio!" I cried out, as the swimmer went over the side of the *Sirena*. And Antonio it was. He turned, waved a hand toward us and was gone. The *Sirena* headed out and drew a little way off, then she drifted.

Olsen was helping me off with my beltweights and suit, when suddenly he grabbed my arm.

"Look there!" he yelled. "Hey, Cap'n, look!"

Everybody rushed for the starboard rail. I saw a whitish shape bearing past us, drifting in the water; it was my old friend the shark, but by no means as he had been. He was now only a floating, dismembered mass of flesh, torn apart.

Fowler came striding up, also the other men.

"What happened down there?" he demanded.

"Search me," I said. "Your charges went off—"

"They did not," he snapped, and walked up to the battery. "I'll prove it."

He seized the key switch and threw it. For a long moment nothing happened. Then the ship rocked, was flung violently, and a huge vortex of water

lifted all around us. Gradually we settled down. Bits of wood came drifting up from the wreck below.

Suddenly it flashed over me.

"I've got it!" I cried out. "Listen here—that damned Antonio! That's why he beat it—"

And I told them excitedly about the object I had seen falling, how the shark had gobbled it. Gradually we got things straightened out.

The *Sirena* had appeared swiftly swooping down from the horizon. Antonio must have made up a bomb with a fuse, probably dropped it over the side without being observed. Upon finding that I was not destroyed, seeing the *Sirena* so close, he took no chances, but plunged over the rail and swam to safety.

"Bad conscience," I observed. "And that shark certainly saved my life, Fowler! Antonio was planted here all the time, eh? There's the shark to prove it."

And I told him about the proposition Antonio had made. If I had accepted it, the devil would have blown me up—and every one would have accepted it as a premature explosion. All the time he had been here to destroy Fowler's diver.

"The murdering dogs!"

When Fowler finally understood it all, he went white with rage. Then he turned away and went below.

I WAS out of my suit and the shark had disappeared when Fowler came on deck again. A rifle was over his arm. Without a word to any of us, he went to the port rail and took aim. To the crack of the weapon, a yell went up from the *Sirena*. Pappados stood up in the stern, shook his fist and then suddenly ducked for cover as Fowler fired again.

She sheered off to half a mile and waited there.

The realization of how close my call had been upset me a bit, but I ate my delayed meal and soon shook off all anxiety. Now that we were facing a definite enemy and no mere case of nerves, I was all right. Fowler, Olsen and I held a council of war in the stern, while the men, cursing Pappados and his outfit, took shelter forward from the white-hot sun.

"Kilraine," said Captain Fowler abruptly, "this is now up to you. Those devils are making trouble; they're up to mischief. If you go down to that depth, where we can't haul you up suddenly, you'll be taking chances. You'll have to depend on us."

"Suits me," I observed. "Unluckily, Antonio will tell them of my report. They'll know everything. They have a diver aboard, that's sure. If they try to fight you off, what'll you do?"

"Fight back," snapped Fowler.

"Well, I wasn't down so long, and needn't be next time," I said. "I'll go down in about an hour, and not wait the full two hours. How big are those chests?"

Fowler frowned

"I don't know. With gold stowed, they would be small and heavy. No mud down there to swallow them up, thanks be."

"Put down half a dozen lines, then," I said. "I'll make a quick trip, see what things look like and, if any chests are in sight, I'll make fast."

So it was agreed.

One thing was sure—we had no more traitors aboard. The rest of our men breathed fire and slaughter; if they had caught Antonio then they would have murdered him in a minute. While the lines were prepared I studied the other boat through Fowler's glasses.

What struck me as queer was that there was no sign of Nick Crock aboard her. Nor was there any movement, any stir. Two men were watching us continually, that was all.

When the time was up, I got into the suit again, and it was hot work climbing into woolens under that burning Mexican sun. The last thing, I took another look all around. Still no activity aboard

the fishing craft, and the bleak desert shoreline was quite empty.

Then I was getting on the helmet.

They lowered me rapidly this time; I must have come close to the record of two hundred feet in forty seconds. I signaled for caution, landed safely, disengaged my extra lines and started for the wreck.

What a scene met me! The stern portion had not only been split in two; it had been blown into fragments. The whole ocean bottom was littered with the remnants of ship and cargo. I stood looking around in amazement, signaled all well and at once tried to pick out my prey.

Here were barrels, boxes, hogsheads —all sorts of miscellaneous stuff brought from the after holds for the first time since it was stored there eighty years ago.

And there, half buried under all kinds of débris, showed a number of chests— tiny things beside that mountain of freight.

I clambered to them and, with excitement shaking me, made fast one of the lines to a chest. As I did so, Fowler's emergency signal came, four imperative tugs.

"Damn it!" I muttered impatiently, angrily. Next instant I was going up, and going up fast. Fowler was waiting for nothing.

He had to wait for decompression, however. While I hung at the fifty-foot stage the spare lines and the descent line went up past me, indicating that all hands were at work. At the next stage the chest came dangling up, barely missing me, but remained twenty feet up; Fowler was leaving it there, then, evidently not to indicate that anything was being fetched aboard.

I went on, ten feet at a time, unable to guess what was happening above, fired with impatience and anxiety. At last the final and longest wait was over. I was drawn up the remaining ten feet and, as I found the rope ladder and began to climb, the water beside me was churned into foam by the screw turning over. I got out of there fast, let me tell you!

When I came up over the rail, hands grabbed me, helped me along, and my face-plate was flung back. Then I was tripped and brought down headlong, unable to know what was going on until the water cleared from the helmet. The pumps ceased. I heard the spanging crack of a rifle, then another, and found Olsen just in front of me, lying on the deck.

"Lay low!" he cried out, working at my helmet. "Don't move!"

The helmet came off and went rolling against the rail close by.

Spang-g-g!

A bullet hit the top plate, made white ice of the shatterproof glass and whanged off into the sky.

"What's up?" I demanded.

"Another boat," said Olsen.

"Oh! Pappados had his second craft coming, then?" I exclaimed. "With Nick Crock in charge! That's why he wasn't aboard the *Sirena!*"

"Evidently," said Olsen. "They closed in on either side of us and opened fire. Fowler's down; took him below. Don't know yet how badly he's hurt. I'm running."

"Suits me," I said. "Too bad we had to quit, but—"

"Quit, hell!" snapped Olsen. He jerked his hand toward the two Filipinos, who were stretched out along the rail. "Those two boys stuck to the pumps like good ones. With you down below, I had to quit, for the time being."

"Hey, Mr. Olsen!" sang out one of the Slavs from up forward. "All right there?"

"Aye, Mikovich," returned Olsen.

A moment later Mikovich called to Olsen again and announced:

"They ain't following us. Looks all clear now, sir."

"Here, Juan!" Olsen beckoned the Filipinos. "Get Kilraine clear of the suit. I'm going down to see about the cap'n."

I SAT up, and the two grinning brown boys helped me with the suit. Behind us was the *Sirena;* the other big Pappados boat, the *Stephano,* lay alongside her. They had deliberately opened fire while I was down, but those two Filipinos had stuck by the pumps like heroes, never missing a beat.

Then I looked down the deck, and felt sick. One of our men, a half-Italian, was sprawled out there in the sun, dead and stiff, his blood all over the deck. This meant that we had six men left. One to cook, one at the wheel, four to stoke the engines. I saw where I would have to turn in and do some honest work.

Free of the outfit, I began stowing it away, sending the Filipinos to lend a hand below and help poor old Maclaren with the engines. I was getting this finished when Olsen appeared at the companionway and sang out my name. I joined him, and we went down.

"Fowler ain't hurt." He grinned happily. "Bullet nipped his skull and bounced off."

We entered the stuffy cabin. Fowler sat in a chair, glaring at us, a bandage around his head. At sight of me he nodded grimly.

"Two close calls in one day, Kilraine. I guess you'll not want to go down again, eh?"

"Keep on bouncing bullets off your wooden dome, and I'll take a chance down below," I told him cheerfully. "Well, we've got one of those chests in tow, anyhow! The others are in plain sight. It's a pipe for those blasted Greeks."

"Not yet." Fowler grinned. "When we saw that second craft coming, I slipped the cable and drifted for three hundred yards or so. Took the buoy and marker along."

"Didn't they see you?" I exclaimed.

"No. We didn't advertise it."

"Holy mackerel!" I said, delighted. "They've probably got only one diver, and he'll fish around for half a day before locating the wreck. What do you plan to do?"

"See what's in that chest, first thing," said Fowler. "Sure it's made fast?"

"Absolutely."

We went on deck. The body of the dead man had disappeared, and we asked no questions about it. If we ever got back to port Fowler would have to do some tall lying—or else tell the truth and get the authorities after Pappados, which would do little good.

By this time we were a couple of miles away from the other two craft, and were in close to the Mexican coast. The chest, which had been left dangling on a twenty-foot length, was hauled close in, and just in time, for the line had nearly chafed in two. The engines were stopped, and all hands gathered as we brought in the chest, old Maclaren stumping up from below to have a look with the rest.

It was a small enough chest, not over three feet square, and cursedly heavy. It was fastened with huge, old-fashioned padlocks, which like the chest itself were now only shapeless bits of rusted iron. Tools were brought up, and we began cracking it open.

Fowler, using his glasses, reported that a diver was getting ready to descend from the *Stephano.* Evidently Nick Crock had stayed behind to get hold of a deepwater man.

There was a yell, and we closed in. The chest was open.

WE HAD the gold. The chest held a dozen little gold bars, gloriously heavy, each one well packed to avoid chafing. Each was fresh as the day it was minted and bore various mint marks. We sat around for ten minutes playing with the bars, hefting them and wondering what they were worth, then somebody sang out that the *Sirena* was heading for us.

"Olsen, see that the chest is locked in my cabin!" snapped Fowler. "I'll take the wheel. All hands below to help Mr. Maclaren! Kilraine, come along and get a rifle."

I went with him to the pilothouse. The *Esmeralda* was so old that she did not have steam steering gear. Fowler stood at the wheel and nodded toward rifles piled on the lockers behind. He threw over the spokes, and we headed out from shore.

"He's nosing along to keep us from making any attack while his diver's down," said the skipper scornfully. "As if I'd try that dirty sort of work!"

I picked up a rifle and waited.

The *Sirena* nosed along to cut in on our course. As she drew closer I saw a huge figure standing up in her bows, waving a hand to us. It was Pappados himself.

"Wants to speak us, eh?" said Fowler. "Call up Mikovich and another man who can use a rifle, and take cover. Don't fire until I give the word. I'll talk to him."

I obeyed. Under slow speed, we headed out. The intentions of Pappados were obviously pacific, for he remained standing in the bows in full sight. Nobody else was visible aboard his craft. My trips had been made aboard the other boat, so I did not know the *Sirena*.

Getting up slap into the bow, I waited there. The other two men took cover along the port rail. Fowler stopped the engines and stepped out of the pilothouse. Pappados cut down his speed until he was barely crawling along, then waved a greeting to us.

"Hi, Cap'n Fowler!" he called in his stentorian voice. "What for you start shooting?"

"What for?" roared Fowler. "You ask why, you damned blackguard, after that rat of yours tried to blow up my diver?"

Pappados shook his big, swarthy jowls.

"You mean Antonio? He's not my man, Cap'n. I've got him here. I'll turn him over to you if you want. We just found out what happened."

This was staggering.

"If you're not lying, hand him over!" returned Fowler. "You've killed one o' my men too."

"You shouldn't have started shooting," said Pappados suavely. "You hit a man here too. Haven't quit the wreck, have you?"

"Not yet," said Fowler. "Don't you wish I had?"

The Greek spread out his hands.

"No matter to me, Cap'n. There's plenty for both of us, so come on back and go to fishing if you like. Throw me a line and I'll put Antonio aboard."

"Chuck him over and let him swim back," snapped Fowler, scowling.

"I will not," said Pappados. "We picked him up swimming, after he was done up and nearly dead. Throw us a line! I won't be responsible for killing him."

"You lie," called Fowler angrily. "Nearly dead, my eye! What's your game, Pappados? Trying to put your men aboard me?"

Pappados let out a bellow of sheer rage and shook his fist furiously.

"You fool, can't you see I'm playing straight? My men won't trust you; they won't stand up, but I will! Shoot and be damned! You've started it already. D'you think I won't see you behind the bars for this work? You bet I will! But I won't have you saying I hired this thug to blow you up! He thought I'd pay him for doing it, but I've learned him different. Throw us a line and you can have him."

It sounded plausible, and it was plausible. Although Pappados knew some of us had rifles trained on him, he stood there, clear of all cover, and roared out his message.

That crafty Greek wanted to steer clear of the law, up to a certain point, and it was like him to doublecross Antonio. As yet he had no gold to fight for, and did not know of its existence for certain. We did. And there was enough truth in his accusations to shake Fowler.

"All right," sang out the skipper suddenly. "Kilraine, throw him that line! Bear down easy, Pappados; and mind, we've got you covered!"

A tangle of lines was close by me. I rose, began to coil one in my hands, and glanced back down the deck. The other men had come up from below, had taken rifles and were ranged along the rail. The *Sirena* was fairly close now. Pappados turned, and his voice came clearly to us.

"Slow speed, there! Ready to reverse. Two of you men, fetch up that rascal."

Then he waved his hand at me with a grin of recognition. I paid no heed, but coiled up more of the line and stood ready for the throw.

For all her size and weight, the bow of the *Sirena* was lower than ours. She could not come alongside, for her gratings were out, where the crew stood to bring in fish and jerk them to the runways. She was not ten feet away when I made the cast, and the line fell close to Pappados. He stooped and caught it, pulled in on it—then shouted something over his shoulder in Greek and gave a heave on the line.

There was no time to think, to act, even to cry out. I was groping for the end of the line to make it fast, ignorant that I stood in a bight of it. My cast had fouled both feet in the cursed thing, and Pappados had seen it.

Just as he heaved in, I tried to get clear, and the line drew taut. Then his craft began to surge backward. He gave another heave before any one realized what was happening.

I was jerked over the low rail like a hooked fish.

Half strangled by salt water, held firmly by the line about my ankles, not yet aware of fate's scurvy trick, I was entirely helpless.

The *Sirena* gathered speed instantly, drawing away from our craft. Pappados danced about in her bow, cursing, holding the line, ordering his men to help. Two of them appeared and hauled in on me. Captain Fowler, still thinking it all an accident, ordered our men not to fire.

Pappados got his craft halted, then hauled me in over the rail. At the same instant she started again, and those twin engines spun like a top. Before Fowler realized the truth, the *Sirena* was heading away with a bone in her teeth, and there was no more chance to shoot the Greek or his men.

It was all very simple, and done very neatly. From the instant he saw me fouled the crafty Pappados must have changed his entire plan of campaign.

As I stood up, coughing out water, he came up to me, slammed me under the ear and knocked me halfway across the deck, then jumped after me. There was no need for more, however. I hit my head against a ringbolt as I went down, and it knocked me cold.

And that, for awhile, was the finish of a perfectly good diver named Kilraine.

I AWAKENED with a sore head, found the slanting rays of sunset coming in at a port above me, and realized that I lay on a cabin bunk. Everything came back to me. Suppressing a groan, I got to my feet, staggered to the door and found it locked. I went back to the bunk and stood looking out the port.

This faced the coast, and a couple of miles off I could see the *Esmeralda*, apparently lying at anchor close to the shore. I dropped on the bunk and stretched out again, wretchedly helpless. From the deck above came a tumult of voices and a stamping of feet. Then the voice of Pappados sounded jubilantly outside my door.

"You bet, Nick! You bet! We'll have a drink all around on it! Wait a minute."

I closed my eyes, heard the key turned in the lock, knew he was looking in at me. Then the door shut again, and he was gone. More noise up on deck, then it gradually quieted.

The afternoon was gone. Had they found the chests? Perhaps. At all events, they had me safe, and this meant Captain Fowler was blocked. Nor did he have enough of a crew to attack

these two craft. With their gasoline engines and speed, they had the heels of him.

Presently there was a stamp of feet in the passage. I stretched out, playing 'possum, and two men came into the room, Pappados and Nick Crock.

"He's still laid out, eh?" said Nick, with a laugh. "Give him a drink."

"Wait," said Pappados. "You're sure Cristoforo won't go down again?"

"Sure," answered Nick in his brutal way. "He was down too long, making fast to that chest. He's sick now, half paralyzed."

I barely repressed a shiver as I thought of it. Their diver was done for. Nick Crock had brought him up too quickly.

"Then we'll make this one do the work in the morning, eh?" said Pappados. "Burn his feet a little, and he'll agree."

"He'd better," said Nick. "Make it worth his while, eh? Now that we've actually found the gold, Cap'n, we'd better take care of the *Esmeralda.*"

"Sure; later tonight," assented Pappados. "Do it with your craft; she's stouter than this one, and Fowler's old wreck is rotten. Slam straight into her. I'll stand by to pick you up with your men. Let's see about this fellow now. Give me that bottle."

He lifted my head and poured liquor into my mouth.

Gold! Then they had found the chests, had brought up at least one! Now they would stop at nothing. And they were already planning to murder Fowler and his men this very night. Damn the gold of yesterday!

SPLUTTERING, I sat up and blinked at the precious pair.

They looked down at me; they had me, and knew it. Pappados glared at me, Nick Crock eyed me with his tigerish grin and rubbed his hairy thatch. The former spoke.

"Kilraine, you dive for us tomorrow morning."

"Not me," I said weakly. "You've done me in. I'm sick."

"You'll be well by morning." Nick chuckled. "I'll see to that. Yes or no?"

"You'd force me to it?" I groaned.

"Yes," said Pappados. "Will you go down willingly?"

I knew that these two brutes were capable of anything, with the lure of gold firing their blood to madness.

"What do I get out of it?" I asked.

"Ha! That's better," said Pappados. "Get one of those bars, Nick."

Nick went out. Pappados sat down beside me and patted my hand.

"Boy, you can fight good," he said approvingly. "I don't bear no hard feelings. You stick by us now. We'll treat you right, see? You bet we will. I'll give you ten per cent of everything we pull up. Ain't that fair? And to start it, here's an earnest."

Nick came into the cabin, carrying one of those same little gold bars. So I knew they had at least one chest.

"This is yours, Kilraine," said Pappados, as Nick put the bar down on the bunk beside me. "Ten or twelve of these in every chest, eh? One tenth to you. You'll be rich, Kilraine! Understand? Rich! We'll all be rich!"

"By glory!" I exclaimed, as I fingered the bar. "Gold?"

"Solid gold," said Pappados, wiping sweat from his fat jowl and trying to keep the greedy glare out of his eyes. "And plenty more like it for the getting. So you hadn't pulled up any of those chests, eh? Well, we have. Now you feel better, boy?"

"I'm hungry," I said, and lay back. "And mighty sick, Cap'n."

His big fingers patted my hand again.

"All right. We'll send you some supper and a light, but you better go to sleep."

"What about Cap'n Fowler?" I exclaimed suddenly.

Pappados grinned.

"Never mind. We'll square it with him. See you later."

The two of them stamped out.

I was neither weak nor sick; I was in a bad jam, and realized it perfectly. A desperate palsy of horror gripped me. Mexican waters! All too well I knew what that meant now, with half a million in gold at stake. No quarter! Here were two shiploads of utter brutes, and I held the bag. Give me ten per cent? Sure! And last trip down I'd never come up.

The lingering sunset glare died away, and darkness spread over the water. There was an electric switch by the door, for the *Sirena* had big generators and was up to date, but I left it alone. I just wanted to lie there and think. Later tonight they meant to ram Fowler with the *Stephano*. Pappados cared nothing if he sank his other boat. There would be some likely story told to get the insurance, and he would have Fowler out of the way for good and all.

And what about me? If I wasted any time I was just plain out of luck.

What really got me was the way they talked about that Greek diver, Cristoforo. He was done for, and they were entirely callous about it. This gave me the horrors as I lay there and thought it over. They'd send me down, if they had to knock me unconscious and put me down, and my one chance was to obey them—or so they thought. I knew they would leave me down at the finish, too, if only to shut my mouth.

The more I thought about it, the more it got under my skin. I lay there in a cold sweat, scared stiff. I was not thinking of Fowler now; I was thinking of myself.

When Antonio came with my supper I was trembling all over and wet with perspiration.

Yes, it was Antonio himself, sleekly handsome. He switched on the light, set down the tray he carried and surveyed me with his insolent smile.

"Sick, eh?" he said. "Well, that is good enough. I am sorry, my friend. That was all a bad mistake, this morning. I did not mean to hurt you."

"No, you're a good fellow, a kindly soul." I groaned. "I'm sick!"

"Listen!" Antonio said earnestly. "That bomb fell overboard, my friend, by accident. I did not mean to hurt you—"

Suddenly his eyes bulged as he saw that gold bar on the bed.

"You—you have one here?"

I sat up, stretched, yawned—and then I was at him with one leap.

The first crack landed smack over his belt. I let him have one-two to the chops and knocked him against the wall. He bounced back at me like a rubber ball, and I landed another to the jaw, but missed the point. A knife flickered in his hand, and he came at me.

It was a wild party while it lasted. I got his knife arm and we grappled; a rabbit-punch drew a squawk out of him, then we hit the deck and went rolling in a fierce tangle. We came up suddenly against the wall, then he went limp. I pulled away, felt something warm on my hand, and looked down at him. That knife had gone through his throat—clear through.

After that there was only one thing to do, and quickly.

I frisked Antonio for a weapon, but found none. I could not touch the knife; it made me feel sick to look at him. I rolled the body under the bunk, then switched off the light and went out of the cabin.

As the cabin space was under the bridge, I was somewhere amidships. A roar of voices came from the mess cabin, and I listened. Nick was still aboard us, for his voice reached me amid the din. There was, I gathered, high celebration both in food and drink.

"You devils will have something else to celebrate pretty quick," I muttered, and came out on deck by the starboard rail.

A hundred feet away lay the *Stephano*, moored. Even now, I thought, that poor devil of a diver lay dying aboard her. At the rail below me two boats were moored. There lay my way

of escape, but it was too uncertain as yet. And besides, mere escape was not what I wanted. This was war, and literally war to the knife, as I had found.

I turned back below, and lucky that I did so. For, at this moment, there was a wild eruption of voices and a pounding of feet. Out poured the whole outfit on deck, and Pappados roared the others down.

"Two of you stay here!" he bellowed. "Nick, the rest of us go with you. We'll lay 'em aboard and make sure of them. Everybody come! Two of you bring back one boat. Come on!"

They were drunk, fighting mad, their brute passions brought full to the surface by gold and fear. Even now they feared Fowler. Paradoxically, they had lost all caution; they roared in drunken savagery as they piled over into the two boats and started for the other craft.

For a moment I hesitated. What a chance here, if I only knew how to manage the engines and start her off! But she was too big. One man could not do it all. Besides, she was anchored and I did not have much time. Two of them would be back in a few minutes with one of the boats—the one I wanted. I heard the voice of Nick Crock lifting in drunken tones.

"Head out, Cap'n, eh? Then come in on 'em. No chance to run—"

I turned and found my way to the engineroom. Here some accident had knocked out the electric lights. A lantern hung from a hook on the wall. This was a filthy place, as might be imagined with such an outfit, and a shame it was. Oil was everywhere, grease, oily waste piled in the corners. I kicked a lot of it together, felt in my pockets, found my matches ruined from my immersion.

There was the lantern to serve me, however. I grabbed it and took off the chimney.

Two minutes later, with every door closed and locked behind me, I crept to the rail and watched the one boat returning, two men rowing her. The boat came in under the side. The two men clambered back aboard and made a rush for the mess room and the unfinished liquor.

I slid down into the boat and cast off. The *Stephano,* with her lights doused, had slipped her moorings and was heading seaward.

TO ROW that heavy boat alone was impossible, but I could stand in the stern and scull her with excellent success. The night was dark; not even a star showed.

Nothing happened anywhere. I could see the riding lights of the *Esmeralda,* but the Greek outfit showed none at all. Behind me the *Sirena* showed only riding lights. As the time passed, I stared back at her incredulously, uneasily. No alarm, no sign of fire! Then the oily waste must have burned out after all, and I had failed.

Angry, desperate, I sculled on for my own ship, hoping to warn Fowler.

Vain hope! I was still half a mile from her when a rifle-crack lifted spitefully from her deck. Fowler was keeping watch, right enough. Then half a dozen rifles spoke, this time denoting the position of the unseen *Stephano*—close to Fowler's craft. Pappados was wasting no time, was doing no ramming, but was going smack aboard us.

The crash came distinctly to me as the two craft smashed together. A glance behind showed me that all was dark and silent with the *Sirena,* and my heart sank.

Well, why not try again? My pulses leaped suddenly. I could do Fowler no good now, but if I could get aboard the Greek craft she would be empty. I could fire her, at least! It might mean everything. I changed my course.

At this moment the decks of the *Esmeralda* burst into a lighted glare. Fowler had not been caught napping after all. His deck lights were on; also, his searchlight was spluttering down full on the conflict.

Murderous work was there in that blaze of light, for rifles were cracking fast. Then, all at once, the searchlight fizzled out; a bullet had smashed it.

With that searchlight blazing down on the fore decks of both craft, Pappados had not been able to get his men aboard. Now, with the light gone, the rifles ceased speaking. Yells broke out, and I heard Nick Crock's bellowing roar. Then my boat swept in under the side of the fishing craft, and I was clambering on to the grating.

Next instant I was over the rail and making a dive for the midship cabins. I knew where Crock kept his liquor.

A fierce scrimmage was going on as I ducked into the passage. A light was blazing there, and as I came to Nick's cabin, the door swung open and out came Pappados, blood on his face. I went straight into him and landed full weight over his belt. He doubled up and went staggering.

I slipped on into the cabin.

A bottle—another bottle—I smashed them, sent the liquor splashing over the bunk. Then I found matches on the table. Next instant, bluish flame was leaping up from the ignited liquor, and I ducked out.

There was Pappados, just getting to his feet, jerking out a pistol. I made a leap, hit the electric bulb with my fist, and everything went black.

Then I was out on deck, darting forward. Getting into the bows, I found that grapnels held the two craft grinding together, and with a jump I gained the bow rail of my own ship. A furious hand-to-hand struggle was forward directly ahead of me, but as I straightened up a terrifying chorus of yells arose. I glanced around.

From the *Sirena* was ascending a sudden puff of flame. That fire had taken hold, after all!

The next instant a wave of dark figures was upon me as Nick Crock and his men bore back for their own ship. Pappados was there, shouting frantically. One of the crowding figures caught sight of my face, reached for me, and then Nick Crock himself was upon me like a madman. I stopped him with a jab to the face, heard the roaring discharge of a pistol at my ear, and with the shock everything went dark.

I wakened for an instant as water engulfed me, knew I had gone overboard—and that was all.

AN HOUR later, I stood at the *Esmeralda's* rail beside Captain Fowler, with nothing worse than a sore jaw and a singed head to remind me of my escape.

The *Sirena* had burned out and gone. Her two guards had launched a boat and gone aboard the *Stephano*, which drifted to the southward. Pappados and his outfit had finally extinguished the fire aboard her before it reached the gasoline tanks.

"I ain't worried about them anyhow," said Fowler. "Their fangs are drawn. We got one man bad hurt, but not serious; four more injured more or less, not counting me. But, by glory, we come out on top, thanks to you, Kilraine. Want to go after the rest of them chests in the morning?"

"Not me," I said. "I'm through diving—through for good, or until I get my nerve back! What will the authorities say to all this?"

"Mexican waters, ain't it?" Fowler grunted. "Besides which, we'll tell the truth more or less—say some craft jumped us in the darkness. No more diving, huh? I don't blame you. Let's head up for San Diego, take a dozen more men aboard and come back here. Hire a couple divers, too. We got gold enough aboard right now to do the thing up brown. Suit you?"

"Suit me?" I repeated. "I'm not the boss. Why suit me?"

"Because you're in this thing pardners with me from now on," growled Fowler. "Suit you now? Eh?"

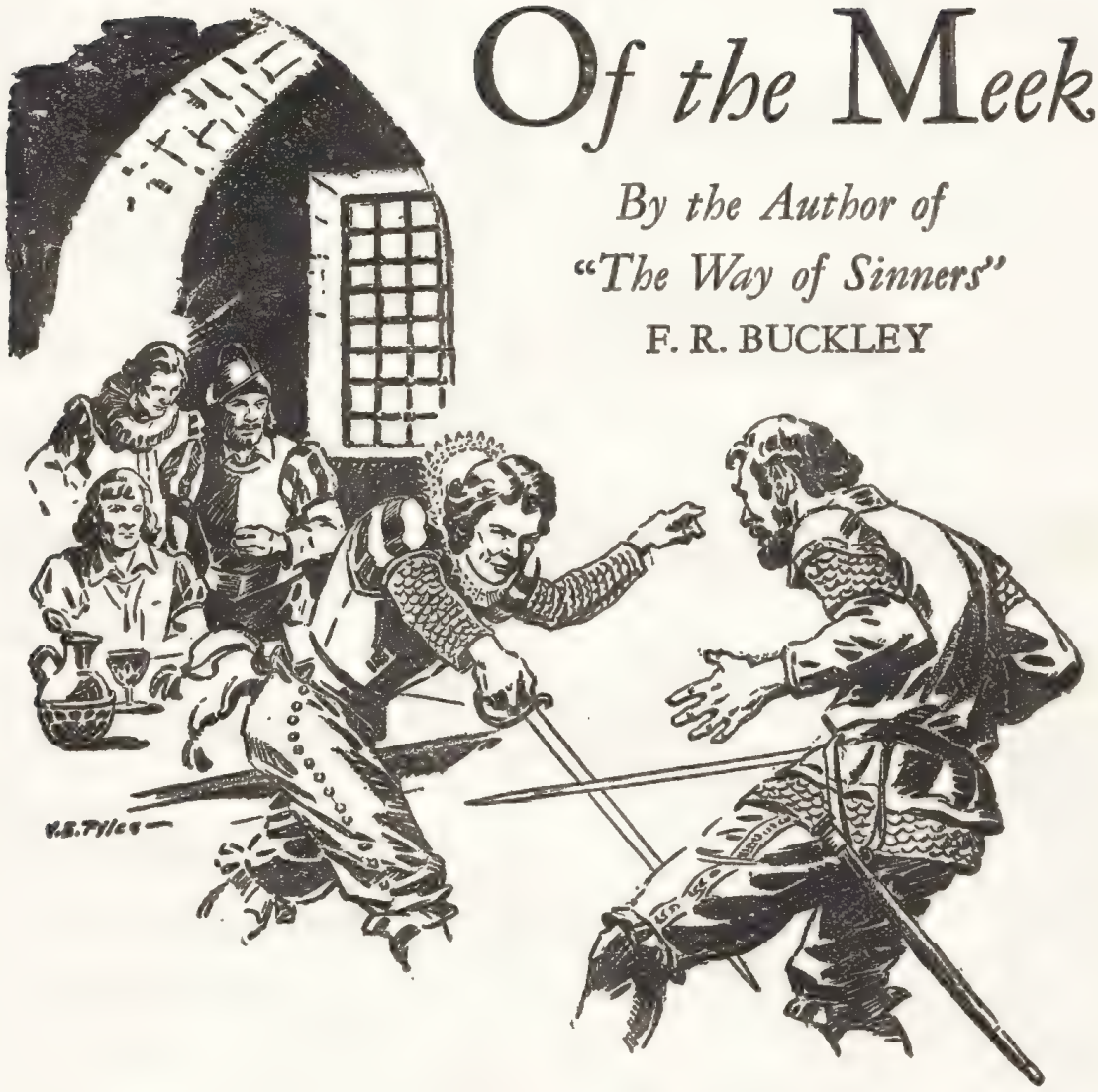
"Shake," I said.

And we shook hands solemnly in the darkness.

Of the Meek

By the Author of
"The Way of Sinners"

F. R. BUCKLEY



To his most excellent and most eminent Grace, Battista, Prince Cardinal of Rometia; from L. Caradosso, the old soldier, humbly kissing the Sacred Purple of his Eminence, these—

MOST excellent and most eminent Prince:

God sees that it is now two days that I have been writing parts of letters to your Eminence and tearing them up at great expense, pulling out my whiskers (whereof I have poor store) and refusing wine and eating feathers off pens until at this moment I am little better than a bolster; all for a light remark of your Excellence's, whom may God preserve in health and clemency still another eighty-four years as he hath the first, amen!

Your Eminence hath doubtless forgot already the saying which hath struck me, to tell truth, in the tenderest vitals. But according to Filippo Varchi, that passed here yesterday, it was thus: that your Grace, by chance reminded of my humble existence, did assert that once—as a careless youth, being then but thirty-four years old—I had laughed at or ridiculed your Reverence; and that if ever I dared set foot in Rometia I

should be hanged.

Sire, may it please your Excellence that after fifty years of campaigning about Rometia I have no less than eight children in your Eminence's domain, whereof seven are the comfort of my old age and the other very civil to me when I am sober; all good steady taxpayers and a credit to their mothers. I have been visiting them ever since I was pensioned in 1553—in broad daylight and without thought that your Eminence bore me any ill will.

Sire, is this the conduct of a man conscious of having mocked your Lordship, even so long ago as 1527? More especially of me, that have been guard captain in the very best families, and ere this hanged folk for laughing at lords' dogs? Nay; a prince of your Eminence's excellence can not think so. Yet laugh while on duty, that lamentable day thirty years ago, I did; I confess it. Protesting humbly that it was not in mockery of your Grace; in proof whereof I write this, praying God to strengthen my writing hand, latterly very rheumatick; and your Eminence to reflect whether a man that will take such pains for visiting of his family is proper to hang in his eighty-third year.

Sire, it was the death of his Grace, Giovanni II of Pontresina, that set your Reverence so dismally in mind of me; and it was with another Lord of Pontresina—the third before this one, Paolo III—that in 1527 I took service as captain of the guard at Castello Vecchio; quarters (though not to myself) and thirty crowns a month. An employ for which, considering the hardness of the times, I thanked God even after I had seen my employers and the guard I was expected to command.

Alas! I am somewhat of an age with your Eminence. Where now is to be found such a family as those Pieri? I know not; and if there is a brood of cutthroats in Italy wherewith I am not acquent, it must be upstart. Nay, the times are adverse for the breeding of such. Venice is against them, the Pope is against them; the French evil and the strength of latter day wines are against them; go to, there are no more.

I was surprised that so many of the kind survived even when I took service with the family; but there they were—some half dozen of them—all sprawled about the castle with twenty or thirty women more or less in common and the dregs of five or six guard troops ever brawling about the courtyard.

Of course they were mightily fallen. The half dozen were cousins and suchlike that had been driven in from outlying possessions of the family; but they were far from extinct. Contrariwise, being full blooded ruffians, unregretting murderers and unblushing thieves in a world even then turning to piety and poison, they had something of the advantage which monsters of antiquity might enjoy if pitted against the fighting leopards of our day.

Of which qualities I received proof ere I had been a week in command.

Thus:

It had been a busy sennight. Firstly, I was required to make the divers remnants of the guard recognize my authority; that took two deaths and three days. Two days more at least I spent inducing the rabble to unlearn its former drills and agree upon my fashion, and another day learning which were my noble masters. There being no choice in point of seediness between them and the menials, I was just coming to recognize nobles by their size and continual drunkenness, when the Count Paolo sent for me and said that he was ready to make war. Aye. On Monday morning this, and with a wench on each knee; and he was making his breakfast of raw beef chopped with onions and washed down with tankards of wine.

We were, it seems, to besiege the Tyrant of Bugasto his castle; and, reducing this, to retrieve the person of one Giovanni, Paolo's fourth cousin twice removed.

"But, Sire—" says I, all aghast.

He got up, finishing two men's

rations of raw meat as he rose and dropping his doxies carelessly on the stone floor. He was a large man, with a red face and the strength of those oxen he habitually devoured; and already he was somewhat drunk.

"Now, we will have no twittering," says he in his vast voice. "No fluttering nor mewing, Master Captain. I have spoken and you have heard me; I have had my plans made these three days, and now the order's given. I shall be ahorse in an hour, and either the troops will be ready or—dismissed. And, ho, Carlo!"

From another room appeared one of his relatives, as large as, and drunker than, himself.

"Watch you," says Paolo, jerking his head at me. "I think he hath thin blood, Carlo. Hesitate not to let some, if it needs thickening."

Which—we marched, by the way, in less than fifty minutes—was his Lordship's usual manner; not that he was unpleasant. For instance, naught could have been more affable than the way in which, riding toward Bugasto, he discussed with me this Giovanni, whose throat, he said, any man less tenderhearted than himself would have cut long since.

"Giovanni is a legitimate child," said Paolo, smiting me on the back so that my eyes bulged and I gasped for air. "There lies the rub. Were he not so, there'd be no danger that this old swine at Bugasto might use him to make trouble for my succession. But, fact is, they like me not hereabouts—nor any of us that are of the true Pieri mold. Too honest; too forthright; too much men for 'em. Whereas Gian's a poor little white faced, hibblety-gibblety thing they can twist as they choose. Why, damme, what's this business of his running away? So please you, I cursed him a little, and shoved him down a flight or so of steps; and behold him gone, and old Bugasto writing me why persecute I the boy. I'll show them persecution, by God's hooks! I'll—What is this, a body of troops, or a mob? Form line there! Right wheel!"

WHEREAFTER in due course we came to Bugasto; and after that, with as little by way of siege as ever I saw in my life, into the presence of the tyrant. Siege! Why, the gates were open; we were met by a guard of honor; and in the courtyard every guard trooper in the duchy sat his horse in ceremonial fig and saluted us. As for the tyrant—old Ugo di Monterosso—never was a more pacific aged man.

I heard later that in his youth he had been notable for embroidering of altar cloths; but visibly he was now long past such fiery delights. His white hair sticking forth from a skullcap, he sat—but here was the rub—in the midst of a numerous honorable assembly, drinking something hot out of a mug. I mean it was the assemblage that irked me, not his posset; and, 'swounds, but how that gathering did irk Paolo!

All the way upstairs he had been swearing pretty valiantly because there was to be no siege; but now he sucked in his breath, lowered his head like a mad bull and became silent. Alas! All hopeful to surprise, he found himself expected. Expectant of some happy hours amid blood and bones, he found himself confronted by the council of nobles, ermined, jeweled, but with troops in the courtyard too.

"Welcome, brother," squawks old Monterosso. "I bid you fondly welcome— What does he say?"

But the man who served him for years was not like to shout what Paolo had said below breath—not to an embroiderer of altar cloths. There were, however, certain present who had been soldiers and knew the likelihoods; of whom one arose and, bowing an inch, addressed my lord.

"Sir," says he, "we—"

"I'm not here for speeches," growls Paolo. "Where's that boy that ran away t'other night? I've come for

him."

"In which connection—" says another noble, rising at a look from the first.

This was a tall man whose face—all but a purple sword cut from eye to jaw point—I seemed to know. Indeed, it was but a few seconds ere I recognized him, Enrico Sforza; of course, the sword cut had been other colored when I gave it to him. He was visibly, even to Paolo, a man not lightly to be interrupted.

"In which connection," says he in his turn, "this council—which your Lordship hath never seen fit to aid in its deliberations—this council, I say, would fain point out to your Lordship—whose captain would perhaps better retire—"

"No!" says Paolo through his teeth. "Speak on!"

"Willingly. The council would point out to your Lordship that it is ware of your Lordship's intentions for this day, and that such doings will not be tolerated."

"What?" yells Paolo, so loud that the tyrant nigh fell out of his chair, and most of the council laid hand to sword. "God's hooks—you tell me—not tolerated—damnation—"

"We say," went on Enrico, whose hand had held his hilt from the beginning, "that you came forth this day, my Lord, to commit breach of the peace against his Lordship of Bugasto, and that we will not permit such. Here is the case: A young man, related to your Grace, is ordered forth from your Lordship's castle; he seeks asylum with our brother of Bugasto; and forthwith what occurs? We learn that your Excellency plans to descend on this peaceful duchy, nominally for the purpose—"

"You learn," says Paolo, almost dumb with rage. "You learn from whom?"

"It is long that we lambs," says Enrico, smiling till his scar writhed, "have had an eye to your Lordship."

"Meaning to say that I am a wolf?"

"Meaning to say merely what was in my mouth when I was stopped," says Enrico, stepping from his seat to the clear space of the floor. "To wit: That while in name your Lordship was coming with force and arms to rescue this young man so recently dismissed—and not in need of rescue—it was your Grace's intention, in this council's opinion, rather to capture and seize this duchy by violence. Which this council will not allow."

Such speech between nobles! Before other nobles too! Oh, but I looked for bloodshed; and should have found it too, then instead of later, had not the door of the chamber at this instant burst inward, admitting a pale young man who, seeing Paolo, at once rushed to him and dropped kneeling at his feet.

"Ah, my good cousin!" says he eagerly in a thin voice. "You have come for me! Then I am forgiven?"

Paolo pushed him aside with his foot; a deed prompted only by his desire to approach Enrico Sforza, but roundly hissed by the other nobles. It seemed to me a gentle push; I was astonied to see how far the young man rolled across the stone floor.

"Your Grace seems less loving to his kinsman," says Enrico, "than this armed anxiety would have seemed to—"

"Art thou a man?" demanded my own lord loudly; at which Enrico seemed to consider.

"Why, by your Lordship's calculations, verily I know not," says he. "I rob no old men, I beat no boys, I have but one wife—"

This last seemed to waken the young man on the floor. He arose and stretched forth appealing hands to Paolo.

"Alas, gentles," says he to the audience. "My lord hath but one wife either, no matter what lies they tell—even his own relatives. And with regard to my lady, on whose account he did curse me, I swear that we no more than read books tog—"

Neither Paolo nor Enrico paid attention to him, but the council did. Be sure they noticed what my lord's own

kin said about him; and would remember that, for all his bull neck, he was not sure of his own wife. Aye.

"Certes," says Enrico, "I have done some little fighting—"

"Ye have?"

"Some little, as I may say. But—"

"Then, blast your soul," roars Paolo, hitting him across the mouth so that the blood came, "off gewgaws, and do some now!"

AN INVITATION accepted instantly, and fraught with dire consequences to several persons; though not to the one for whom, in the beginning, I feared. It had been my experience that bull voiced men like my lord had usually but little breath left for swordplay. I knew (as I have said) Enrico. And now I was sorry for myself, soon to be left workless with the Winter coming! Because workless—Paolo killed—I certainly should be.

The next in succession was Filippo, a cousin; the next Battista, and the next Felice; with all of whom, during my week of captaincy, I had come into disagreement concerning the command of the guard. Each had pretended to authority over the men he had contributed to the troop; each, when I denied this, had drawn dagger to his own discomfiture; and at our riding forth to war, all three had come with us. They were presently in the courtyard. And in the moment of silence while Enrico took off his ermine robe, showing leather hose and chain mail under it, I could hear their bull voices wrangling about who should take senior place on the right flank. Well, methought it would not be long before the captain's place in the center would be vacant for one of 'em; while poor honest Caradosso—

But I was wrong. Yea, I had misjudged Paolo. For unlike most men with bull voices, that have no other quality of the beast, my good lord was a bull all entire—in strength, in ferocity of attack when aroused, and in blind, unwitting courage. He roared, to be sure; but when he roared he charged; and when he charged there was no standing before him.

His first rush at Enrico, made less with his sword than with his hilt and feet, drove that seasoned warrior hopping into the ranks of the council; and had not the nobles gathered up their robes and skipped behind pillars, I am persuaded my lord would have mauled some dozen of them. Even Enrico preferred the other side of a table until, with a long thrust, he had shoved six inches of steel through my lord's upper arm, when he came forth again smiling and measuring his man for the kill. As who can blame him? Certes not I, that had my sword and dagger ready drawn to fly at him.

As I say, we knew not our Paolo. None of us. Not even the pale young man who was his relation and who was now shrieking out of the window to our ruffians in the courtyard.

"Aid, aid!" he was squealing to the compass of his poor voice. "Up, men! They murder our good lord!"

Ha! Much they might wish to murder him, but performance was another matter. The six inches of blade were but as a goad to Paolo; it made him drop his sword. But on the other hand, were there not chairs? Was there not in fact that chair on which old Bugasto had sat until the first charge tumbled him and his posset cup into a corner? Aye; and that chair did his Lordship seize and throw; missing Enrico, but smashing out the whole body of a stained glass window and causing his adversary to cower beneath a shower of shattered saints. In which moment Paolo regained his sword, drew a dagger and returned, seemingly unwounded, to the attack.

I mean not, saying that he seemed unwounded, to imply that he did not bleed. Nay, in this respect likewise he resembled a bull—the whole room was scarlet with him—and yet he used his hurt arm mercilessly and pressed for-

ward with vigor undiminished. He was no swordsman. I doubt if he knew tierce from quart. He took four thrusts in the body without giving one in return, and he killed Enrico by stunning him with his fist and then slashing him to death.

Which I myself saw not, matters in the courtyard having meantime reached a pass wherein I was more needed than I was by my lord.

I have shown that, coming to surprise old Bugasto, Paolo himself had been surprised; it was evident that Enrico had come dressed for combat. And of course the massing of troops in the courtyard had not been a gesture of love. Despite which, I scarce think the council had planned on a battle. Enrico was to kill Paolo quite privately, there in the chamber. The other Pieri were to take warning by his fate, and that was to be all—a scheme ruined by young Giovanni's shriek to our troops for aid. That was the pale young cousin's name, you remember—Giovanni. Giovanni Pieri. Aye.

I went down the stairs four at a time, to find the courtyard as merry a hell as any one could wish.

Since we were the visitors, naturally it was our men that had the station next the door; but on the other hand, since they were the hosts so to speak, it was the Bugastians that lined the staircase. And by no means would they let our men go peaceably into the audience chamber. Ordinarily, between troops on a stairway and troops—if one could apply the term to our rogues—trying to ascend the same, there is no battle; it is a massacre. But if our men were not troops, they were blackguards of deepest hue; and in war blackguards have their uses.

When I appeared at the head of the stairs, closely followed by this Gian who had squealed for help, it was to find my merry men playing, not life-and-death, but king-of-the-castle with the Bugastians; seizing their pikes, that is, and either pulling themselves up thereby, or pulling the defenders down. In consequence of which sport there were already some half dozen of the defenders at the foot of the stairs, and some dozen of my men halfway up.

It was, however, the troops in the courtyard, forming to charge this storming party in the rear, which drew mine own attention; while providing the which, and endeavoring to save Messer Giovanni from death, I received the ax-cut which aches so damnably at this moment.

(Yet I continue. What would I not do to regain the favor of your Eminence?)

Sire, never did nuisance spoil good fight as Gian Pieri spoiled that. His stumbling against me, just as I was about to parry the ax blow, was pure accident; but his doings with his cousins were deliberate, born (as I thought then) of timidity gone mad.

On the right flank was Battista, sadly beset by Enrico Sforza's men, but fighting stoutly; to whom arrived—just when he needed all his wits—this milksop yelling, "O soldiers! Spare him, spare him!" and flinging himself at everybody's knees.

Whereby, of course, Battista was impeded, having but one pair of legs, whereas his adversaries, having several, were scarce discommoded at all and stabbed Battista fourteen times with divers weapons so that he gave up the ghost. After which the victors paid no attention to Gian, but turned on Filippo, who had been attracted by the pale young man his screams, and so rent him that he died later.

Whether Felice would have come for like reason to a like end, I know not; at this moment my lord descended from his killing above-stairs and put things on a sensible basis, I thank God. He was altogether a sensible man, Paolo. When Gian came at him, screeching and getting in his way, he knocked the lad sweetly unconscious with his fist; when the enemy forces hesitated a moment, he charged them single-handed, giving us

the order and the chance to mount our horses. And when we had done this, he gave us the command to charge the dismounted foe in the direction of the gateway. Which we did, and cantered merrily forth into the countryside, his Lordship following with Gian across his saddlebow.

There was some fighting outside the gates—not much; back at the castle we kept our portcullis ready and the lookouts doubled for a week. But there was no attack; that was the end on't. What with the death of Enrico and the loss of fourteen men, the council of nobles had its fill of us; and so there—our losses being six men and my Lord Paolo's two next heirs—the matter rested.

Rested? Ha!

YOUR Eminence, there is no rest for the wicked; and how much less is there for those whom nobles consider virtuous —which is to say, useful. Of regard for your Reverence's hatred of violence (may it extend to the hanging of innocent old men!) I have skimped details of yon scuffle in the courtyard; but there were some which had given Paolo a good conceit of me. To name one—I had gone back for him, when the rest of the troop was far away, and dealt single-handed with seven enemies that desired to make him prisoner. Wherefore he sent for me ere my ax wound was yet a week old and called me old dog; and by way of reward set me spying on this pale faced Giovanni.

"A work," says my lord generously, "I would not entrust to any other guard captain ever I knew, Luigi. It is a matter of her Ladyship."

"Her Ladyship?" says I, dismayed. "But, Sire, consider. Is it like that with a voice such as he hath, the young gentleman should have the quality—"

Paolo waved his great hand.

"Nay, nay," says he, "I think no harm, Luigi; but nevertheless small dogs bite hard. He but walks with her on the battlements as a cousin may—I cursed him for it, but I was drunk then. However, I would know whereof he talks."

"Believe me that it will be of no great matter, Sire."

"I'm of thy opinion. Still, draw discreetly from the sentries its substance; or if they walk in silence, report that. Understood, eh? I only wish," says Paolo, seating himself and wrinkling his poor leathery brow, "that Giovanni were all my grief. Hast thou heard of this business between Carlo and Roberto?"

These, after Felice, were his next heirs in succession, and they had been fighting in the courtyard the night before; Baltazar, the lieutenant who shared my quarters, had seen them. I said so.

"Oh, that," says my lord. "That was but about a wench. Hast heard anything else?"

"Nay, Sire."

"Naught about poison?"

"God forbid!"

He ate his nails and fretted with a dispatch on the table.

"I might as well be dead," he grumbled. "There is no joy in lordship any more. As one soldier to another, Luigi, look you. Here is a letter from Florence, that hath lent me divers moneys, asking questions about the next crop and payments to be made thereon that might puzzle ten farmers and an Ebrew beside. Here is a bull from the council of nobles, all in Latin, meaning that they like me not, yet will not fight; and here is a parchment from that old dotard, the prince-cardinal, asking whether I am truly wed or no, and what is Giovanni's place in the succession? Giovanni's place! Which putteth me in mind—go do what I ordered. Spy you, while I write letters. That is nobility nowadays. Dismissed!"

So I went forth, very far from easy in my mind; for if I may mention such a thing to your eminence, there is very little profit in watching ladies on behalf of their lords. If one see naught, one is responsible for what may hap thereafter; and if one gather interesting news, it is apt to be rewarded with a rope or

that-like. Truly this lady—I had seen her but once—struck me as being of the cold kind; but ice can cover deep water. And as I walked forth upon the battlements meseemed to recall certain gigglings of Baltazar whenas we had both been drunk. He had said something about Carlo and Roberto their fight; though what (having been at the twelfth mug) I could not mind. And now hints of poison. . . .

After reflection on such dark matters, it was a relief to gaze on the suspect actually confided unto me. I met Giovanni by the seventh sentry station, as he returned from his afternoon walk with her Ladyship. He had still under his arm the great book whence (the sentries were in one tale) he was wont to read and expound to her Grace; he had a pale face, stooped shoulders, heavy clerk's eyes; my heart rose at sight of him.

"GOOD morrow, Captain," says he in that thin voice; and plucked me by the arm.

We had had some talks during the week since the battle—principally on the unwisdom of weaklings' interference in matters between grown men; whereon he had, with tears for poor Filippo and Battista, agreed with mine opinion. Now, drawing me into a bay of the battlements and saying that he blamed his good intentions for these deaths, he implored my advice as to the averting of a worse calamity. He said he would fain atone.

"This business of poison between Carlo and Roberto?" I asked him, agog.

"Poison?" says he, seeming stunned. "Nay. What is this?"

I told him, and he laughed.

"Oh, that would be the astrologer," he said. "The old peasant that was with my lord last night. He hath belief in such things; so, finding the crone in my rides abroad, I sent her to his grace. That is all rubbish. But in these same rides abroad, I have found that which is not rubbish, Luigi."

I was scarce of his opinion, either as to astrology or as to what he might have found; but said naught.

"Is it thy opinion that our peasantry is content?" says the young man; to which I replied that none expected them to be so.

"They are very heavy taxed," says Giovanni. "And a discontented peasantry will seek a new master. So this book says. See. 'Thoughts On The Nature Of Lordship' by Saverio Rastelli."

"And whereof was he lord?"

"He was burned some months ago," says Giovanni. "But a man can speak truth and still remain combustible. And I see signs that our peasants—"

I laughed. The hoe wielders of Pontresina setting forth to seek a new prince!

"Nay," says he, "but if the crop fails, how then? Would not Florence take over this county for its debts?"

"What do peasants know of debts?"

"They know!" says Giovanni, smiting the book with more vigor than I thought he had in him. "And they know that Florence would not continue our lord, hated as he is by the council of nobles."

"And with whom would Florence replace him?" says I indulgently. "Besides, how can the crop fail, seeing that it is almost ready for harvest? Are the peasants to go push it back into the ground?"

Giovanni said nothing, but stared at me. His regard, out of large black eyes, was not of a piece with the rest of his insignificance.

"Furthermore," says I, thinking him confuted, "if these peasants are so wise as your Honor thinks them, sure they know that of all the gentry near to his Lordship in succession, certes his present Grace is the least severe by far. Take Felice; Carlo; Roberto! Why—"

"Luigi," says the young man imploringly, "hear me. I speak not idly. My follies have endangered our good lord.

I try to make amends. If what I tell thee be but vain imaginings, so much the better. But I would speak with the peasantry, that I know to be on the edge of mischief, and tell them what thou hast just said. I can persuade them to better ways, I know; but—but—"

"Well?"

"I dare not," says he, twisting his hands, "without some protection. Besides, thy presence with a few soldiers would show that his Lordship was ware of the business and gave me authority —thou knowest—"

"Ask his Lordship, then." It was funny to see this poor trembler setting about to save Paolo and the rest.

"Alack, I am no welcome sight to him since yon business at Bugasto. Wherein, as God's my witness, I strove only—"

"Aye, aye."

It was coming time for my afternoon wine with Baltazar, whom I liked not; yet he was better than this Gian with his ravings. I thought it was my bruskness that made the young man change his gaze; though, truth to tell, it looked more as if he had taken me for a wise man and suddenly found me a fool. As I remembered later.

"Your Honor desired—?"

"This," says Giovanni eagerly. "That you tell his Lordship what I have told you, Captain, and gain his consent to your accompanying me. It is a matter—"

Well, it was rubbish, of course; but on the other hand, the weather was pleasant, the castle was dismal, and so far my duties had kept me from exploring the beauties of the countryside. I mean the beauties of the scenery, your Eminence. So that, after some wine and more thought, I proposed to Paolo Ser Giovanni's plan; to which, after flinging "Thoughts On The Nature Of Lordship" out of the window, he agreed.

"If that's what 'a's been reading to her Ladyship," says Paolo (I had borrowed the book), "no wonder she's been cold to me of late. Poor wench! 'Twould freeze a fish. Aye, take the lad away, in the devil's name; he's about fit to preach to clodhoppers."

WE PASSED a very pleasant ten days, some two squads of us, dull though it was at first when Gian would summon village populations and orate. I say *at first,* because for the first few days the lad yelled against crop burning to folk that crossed themselves at the thought of such enormity; who knew naught about the plans of Florence, cared less and acted accordingly. He might as well have addressed trees in a forest.

Even his threats of punitive expeditions under Felice met no response. The folk knew themselves innocent and trusted God to defend them. It was not until we reached the village of Capo that meseemed there might be something in my young master his fears; and not then until I had been some hours in the village headman's house, drinking with him and other elders while Gian admired babies in the main street. There was a noble for you. Babies!

"Is it true, as the young lord said," asked the *podesta,* "that the count will be making war soon and come recruiting?"

I had paid no attention to Giovanni his speeches; but any promises he had made, certes I could support.

"War?" says I therefore, holding out my mug again. "Why, did he not try to start a war last week — aye, and would have been here recruiting already had not every other noble about here proved chicken-livered? Not that that will discourage him; he'll be here among ye yet, never fear. There'll be many a stout lad fed and clothed, eating and drinking at his Lordship's expense ere long. Make your minds easy."

They looked at each other, and I smote while the iron was hot.

"Whereas, if ye burn the crops," says

I, following Gian's speech as near as I could imagine it, "Florence will take over the county; and think not that she'll give ye another lord such as his Grace, let alone half a dozen of 'em. Nay, she'll put in some weak bellied creature after her own heart — some shopkeeper that daren't beat a dog. And you and your children will be kept grub, grub, grubbing in the ground forever, with no more chance of being soldiers than hath a worm of flying."

"But," says one of the men (I did not then understand that *but*), *"he* saith that Felice would be down upon us with troops. A terrible man, as his young Honor—"

"Terrible?" says I, though Felice was in fact a good natured bullock. "Terrible is no word. Let him be loosed, and there'll not be a man left unmaimed in the countryside."

"And he is next in succession, with a war coming."

This seemed unchancy, so I said naught, but drank.

"Ser Giovanni is of another kind," says the headman.

"Patted my son's child on the head and gave her a denier," says another.

"Yes," says I, "and let my Lord Paolo box his ears and throw him downstairs without doing more than run away. How'd ye like him for your leader? And Florence would give ye one of just such a kidney. Is there no more wine?"

Well, it seemed there was none. Moreover my hosts seemed ungrateful for my good counsel; so I cursed them kindly and went back to the troop. Whenceforward, in every village we visited, the bearing of the folk became worse toward us of the troop, none molesting Giovanni; until at Foggi (where a turnip hit me in the face) I was fain to tell his young Honor that methought we had better turn back.

"What, now?" says he. "When we are just where good may be done?"

"Not by dead men," says I. "And I will tell your Worship, the devil is abroad. Setting aside all turnips and such-like, what did the *podesta* of the last village tell me—me? That they would burn what was their own if they chose, meaning their crops; and that if Felice came among them, they'd eat him and his troops alive!"

"They have not eaten me," says Gian.

"They have pity on your Honor," says I, thinking how all along our route I had described him as a milksop and the afflicted of God—partly to save him from violence, but more to exalt the glory of Paolo. "Look, though, at my nose! Moreover, there be harder things than turnips. And sharper. I have but twenty men, sir; and if I should be asked, 'tis time even now for Felice and half the troops. The country is afire."

"Afire?" gasps the young man, leaping up as if he smelled smoke; and then sank back and said he would consider the matter.

It was while he was doing so—during that night—that two things happened.

For the first, the countryside got on fire indeed. Six fields of wheat, in plain sight of us, burned to ashes with no man hindering.

And for the second, a messenger came from Paolo demanding that we return at once.

Having delivered his letter to Giovanni, the man himself told me so much and was about to impart other tidings more startling, when in comes his young Honor, ghastly in the face.

"Luigi!" says he. "In the sacred name of—"

I went with him into his tent, leaving the messenger to burst of his news.

"Luigi," says Gian. "The dispatch—read you. My head swims."

It was a simple letter, writ by the count himself. It related that Roberto had been poisoned by the evident hand of Carlo; and commanded Giovanni, as one of the family council that must try the criminal, to turn homeward on the instant.

IT WAS no true family council.

For one thing, Felice, the heir-apparent, was away. Two hours before we rode into the castle, he had ridden out, taking half the garrison to suppress wheat burnings and such-like suddenly reported from all parts of the county. Paolo had wished him to take our full strength; but he (I thanked God for his bull pride) had refused. Which nevertheless left but Giovanni and her Ladyship (she had land rights) to sit with Paolo at the judgment board.

Naturally, Carlo objected, showing his ignorance.

"I have paramount right of justice in my own person," says Paolo. "I but extend the privilege of this council of my favor, to mark thee off from the common murderer—cousin."

He snarled the word in a manner to provoke retort; but indeed there was naught exceptionable about the trial. Lords a-many have I stood behind on such occasions, and I could see nothing wrong. The count, far from his custom, was worshipfully dressed, and smelled less of sweat and stables than usual. Proper clerks were in attendance, and so was the corpse, with six candles in place of the usual three. Though why it should have been there—a corpse not slain with steel and therefore unable to bleed when the accused touched it—I know not; save perchance as a sop to the council of nobles. If the useless hath a use, it is to screen the important. Though how Paolo should have gained wits to disguise murder with frippery, I knew not until I glanced at her Ladyship, whose eyes chanced to be on Giovanni. Aye (it flashed across my mind) he had been instructing her from books, whereof women make strange uses.

"I have no objection," says Carlo slowly. He was a man of Paolo's size and build, rather more thoughtful in manner. "Save this, which I know will be denied. For your Lordship's sake, I counsel your Lordship to desist."

"Desist?"

"Yea," says Carlo calmly. "Desist from this farce. In plain words, do not try me, Paolo, or it will be the worse for thee."

"Do not?"

His Lordship, his old self despite washing and new robes, was half out of his chair with a roar that shook the windows, when her Ladyship pulled at one sleeve of his gown, and Giovanni at the other.

"God's body!" says Paolo, beating himself and breathing heavily. "No matter. Call a witness."

"Which, Sire?" asks a clerk.

"Any, curse it, any!" roars my lord. "My lady here is accuser; she had the tale from her maid that saw the poison given. Call her. Call anybody, and let's be done."

Carlo stepped forward.

"My Lord," says he, "if there are witnesses to be called, be ware that I have witnesses, too. These clerks are here to make records which, the first oath taken, must go to the council of nobles."

"Let them!" says my lord. "I ask no better. Mayhap it will show that lot of old women that in my lands justice is justice, be murderers who they may. Go to!"

Carlo was amazed.

"Is it possible?" says he to himself, wondering.

Well, there was a moment, I knew not why, when of a sudden I had envy to look away from his Lordship; away from the accused; from the corpse, from Giovanni, from her Ladyship—into the groinings of the ceiling, where shadows flickered to and fro as the draughts shook the candle flames. Aye; my soul felt that room was a good place whence to flee, if only in the imagination.

"Is it possible? Aye, and sure!" shouts Paolo. "Come, man, confess. I'll give thee time to kill thyself—"

"And 'tis her Ladyship that accuses me?" says Carlo. "Wilt give her the same clemency if she confess?"

Her Ladyship made a choking sound and half rose; it was Gian's hand that reached over and forced her back into her seat. His Lordship was staring at Carlo like one pole-axed.

"Her Ladyship?" d e m a n d e d he. "Hast gone mad, man?"

At which Carlo laughed. Aye, aye; there was no mistaking that whatever was toward, Paolo was as innocent of it as one of the castle steers. He knew less than at this moment I foreboded; which God knows was little enough.

"I will inform your Grace," says Carlo easily.

He paused, his eyes still on her Ladyship, and seemed to roll a sweet morsel in his mouth. He was a vain man before women; and if her Ladyship's eyes had wandered from the strict path of duty, they had not rested with favor on him. I learned this later; for the present, I wondered at him.

"Your Grace was warned," says he, "by an astrologer paid to rouse your Lordship's suspicions, that I should practice against Roberto by poison. Now I am accused of the fact, and that there is evidence I doubt not. But by ill luck I am not quite without wits. If your Grace had suspicions, so had I; if I can be accused, I can accuse in return. If her Ladyship hath witnesses as to this poisoning—so have I. Among them myself."

"Thyself!" says Paolo, scornful but ill at ease.

As for her Ladyship, she was suddenly pale as her shift.

"Myself. Who heretofore, though but a fifth cousin, have acted brotherly to your Lordship in sparing his natural pride. But truth to tell—"

Truth to tell, your Eminence—ever ominous words; at which in this case my eyes came down from the ceiling and fastened pretty sharply on Messer Carlo. And, alack, but evidently it was the truth he told, the truth about Roberto and her Ladyship; a truth I will not scandalize your Eminence by repeating, but it was very bad. Ah, I could hear veracity in his voice; I could see it in her Ladyship's face. Besides, I knew about those window fastenings in the west tower. Then there were witnesses; a pastry cook; a servant of the table; and the apothecary that had sold her Ladyship's maid the poison.

PAOLO leaned back, ashy, in his chair. Aye, there were three pale faces at the board by this time, and if Gian had two spots of red high on his cheekbones, they but made him look the whiter.

"Dost pretend—" says my lord, almost in a whisper.

"That she stopped our c o u s i n ' s mouth? What else? And I can tell thee why she chose me, of all living, to shoulder the blame. Ah-ha, Giovanni! I have *thee* there."

"Me?" gasps Gian, the red spots flashing out of sight.

"Aye, thee, little snake. But one thing at a time. Come, Paolo. My witnesses will be more amusing than thine. Shall I call them? Wouldst hear her Ladyship's *other* maid—that served her before marriage? Come!"

Slowly my lord arose. Carlo was by now but just across the table from him; and as the two men stood eye to eye, Giovanni got up.

"B-brethren," says he in his weak stutter, "b-bethink you. This is a court of law. O gentlemen, what shall the council of nobles say if ye fight together like brutes, instead—"

I know not what Paolo had had in mind; but the word *fight* sped home to him. His eye glowed.

"True," says he like a man in his sleep. "Let us not bother the council. I do dissolve this court, and will myself do justice. Captain, clear all baseborn from the room. Out, dogs!"

"I go, sire," says I, when this was done.

I was trembling at the knees; her Ladyship had fainted and I dared not pick her up; verily I ached to be away

from there.

"No, stay thou," says Paolo. "Give Messer Carlo thy sword."

I obeyed, saying that it was a guard sword, over a hand's-breadth too long. Whereat Giovanni rushed forward saying cousins must not fight and that he wit well her Ladyship was innocent of everything; which Paolo silenced by pushing him aside.

"A hand's-breadth, eh?" says my lord, drawing his own and coming from behind the table. "But doth not God decide these matters? Fall to!"

Once more I spare your Eminence the ungodly spectacle of violence; and, gods above, what a spectacle of violence was that! Your Grace, I turn my very thoughts from it, stating baldly that Paolo fought more after the manner of wild beasts raging than like Christian men; that the hangings were in tatters, and the windows broken, and the corpse and its candles overturned ere they made an end . . .

And that we buried Ser Carlo in consecrated ground next morning early, while the birds sang.

AH, YOUR Excellence! How blind is that mortal (if such meditation may be excused in a plain soldier) who fixeth his eye only upon the life of the body! For example, I had within three weeks seen three of my masters, all solid men, snatched from this world by violent death; yet it was not until after the news about Felice that of a sudden it struck me what all these deaths meant to the county. At my coming to Castello Vecchio, behold there had been a very plethora of nobles, so that I had had much ado learning which was which in the succession to graduate my respect according.

It was not until we heard that Felice had been ambushed and torn into shreds by the peasantry that of a sudden I looked about and saw that of all the dynasty none remained save Paolo and little Giovanni; it was a shocking thought and, even at that late date, not mine own. Nay, it was given to me by that squinting lieutenant, Baltazar, as we went to take orders from his lordship on the morning that the news came.

"Hadst not seen that?" demands this underling, of my open mouth. "Verily hast more brawn than brain, my Caradosso."

"Thy what?" I asked him.

"My Captain," says swivel-eye, whining as brains will before brawn. "But indeed, Captain, it was plain to be seen; and 'tis for thy benefit I spoke."

"How for my benefit? What have I to gain?"

"Why—"

We were now almost at the door of my lord's cabinet; it opened, and Giovanni came out, paler and more distraught looking than ever. Without answering me, Baltazar bowed deeply to his young Honor and watched his receding spindleshanks with a strange, secret smile.

"O God!" the lieutenant shrieked as I bespoke his attention. "Hast broken my jaw! Aye, Captain, I will explain. But not here. Later, in—in our quarters, at the change of guard. It is a weighty matter, Captain."

"I hope so," says I, meaning it had need be to excuse his freedom. "And meantime take up thy gorget another hole. Tighten that buckle. So!"

I knocked on the door.

Well I knew, of course, that there was trouble about; but no more than I had noticed how death had undermined the succession had I observed the county's sinking into its actual parlous state. That our peasantry was in revolt I knew, from the tidings about Felice; though the suddenness of the affair was a puzzle to me. What I knew not—indeed, the messengers had but just come and were standing all dusty before his Lordship—was that we were also to be attacked by divers of the council of nobles; and that Florence was

proposing to send troops. These last were, in name, to put down our revolt and save what was left of the crops; actually, of course, they were to occupy the county in satisfaction of the debt, and that would mean an end of Paolo his lordship.

As for the missive from the council, it threatened open war, and on such grounds as should have the support of the Pope—to wit, the killing of Carlo without trial; and the shutting up of her Ladyship (also without trial) in the west tower.

"I trusted not myself in the matter," says Paolo, when I humbly showed him the folly of this last. "I was for disbelieving all or cutting her throat; and could not decide which. 'Twas Giovanni counseled the middle course; God knoweth he is prudent. *Madonna, madonna, madonna mia,* my head will burst!"

"The messengers await answer, my Lord," says I.

"This is no time for letter writing," he lowed.

"If we are to send a column after Ser Felice—" says I.

Paolo recovered himself and laughed.

"Ah, if!" says he, cheered by the thought of battle. "But why should we? By report there is not a rag of his troop nor a blade of unburned wheat left in the county; whereas we need all the men we have to discourage these nose-pokers. And methinks we have enough, eh, Luigi? And a gun or two, unless these old eyes fail? And a strong arm or two still left in high places, even if Ser Gian hath gone to his room to weep.

"Ho-ho! The lad came in to say the peasants are at Mestrovici with their billhooks, and I thought he'd have blubbered. They're shouting death to me, it seems; I knew not Gian loved me so much. Well, well. We will make our dispositions, Luigi; we will see what may be done."

Which we did, Paolo swearing wonderfully, performing the work of six men in picking cannon bodily up and moving them; and smiling and clapping every one on the back meantime.

"Thou'lt take the north wall, Luigi," says he as Baltazar and I stood saluting at the entrance to his quarters. "And the sergeant the east. 'Tis a pity my Lord Gian knoweth not one end of a sword from the other but, in the circumstances, I will command both the west wall and the south with help from ye two as needed. Dismissed!"

"YON'S a man," says I to Baltazar when we had reached the wine waiting for us in our quarters.

Upon which my sergeant-lieutenant, already disciplined that day for smiling, burst forth into a roaring laugh.

"Aye!" says he, setting down his untouched mug lest his convulsions spill it. "A mere man, and thou speakest the word with admiration. Ho-ho-ho!"

"Baltazar—" says I, rising; and I confess I was about to do violence on that innocent, for though no more than your Eminence's Excellence am I a man of violent passions, yet no more than your Grace's Reverence do I enjoy the laughter of inferiors over a jest unknown to myself.

I have thought—as a low captain of guards—that to every man God grants rank above others. He also gives a sense of unworthiness, which may save your humble servant some trouble at the Judgment Seat; but which makes the exalted severe on subordinate laughter. Until it be explained that Baltazar laughed as I might if some one attempted to explain my explosion in your Eminence's presence, that occurred a bare week after this whereof I write; and as Baltazar would have explained his gurglings—had he lived.

Very like to live he looked, too, his face all red from merriment, imploring me with one hand not to strike him, and with the other picking up his pot; his eyes meantime running with strange mirth.

"Nay, but no disrespect," says he, choking. "Drink a cup, Captain; hear me two minutes only and I promise you shall laugh as loud as I. To our new lord then!"

"To our new—?" says I; but there was no answer from Baltazar.

Nay. I saw his eyes, at first fixed mockingly on mine, take suddenly an amazed look more urgent than mine own; then darken into a stare of mixed agony and terror. Instantly thereafter the man put his pot down, stood up with a sprawling stagger that knocked the mug clattering on the floor, made a croaking sound, clutched at his throat and fell amid the legs of his chair—dead!

Aye, dead; I felt not his heart, I thrust not my thumb in his eye; but I had the best authority for the fact. That of Ser Giovanni, whom of a sudden I perceived (dream fashion), to be standing before me; and who (as I still stared by preference at the corpse) calmly moved Baltazar's chair and sat in it.

"Dead? But—but by what means?" says I, crossing myself.

"Naught out of the way," says Giovanni, laughing. "I poisoned him."

I said nothing. He seemed merrier than ever I had observed him; also, instead of his usual clerk's dress, he was wearing leather and chain mail and a sword. It was a long sword with one of the new French hilts; he carried it in loops. And behind him, in sign of his most astonishing entrance, a piece of the solid stone wall had swung open on hinges and still remained so, a secret door.

"Come, Luigi," says the young man, in a fuller voice than was his, "sit and drink thy wine. 'Sblood, man, don't fear it! I'll drink the half. There!"

He tossed off his share of the pot at one gulp and folded his arms on the table.

"Now, look you," says he briskly. "I have no time to waste, Captain. It is now four o'clock; the peasants will be at the gates by nightfall, and the Florentines and the troops of the council not much later. Ye know who hath brought them here—who hath brought all these things to pass?"

Your Eminence, I am but a poor simple soldier even now; and at that time my wits were somewhat shaken. I therefore goggled at the boy until he beat upon the table and demanded an answer, and then told him I supposed it was God, the Corrector of Princes. At which he waxed angry and said not so; it was himself.

"Didst thou not know?" he said, shaking me by the shoulder. "Why, even that poor husk on the floor knew. He helped me. Indeed, I killed him for knowing too much. O fool! O Luigi! Yet thou'lt make a good guardsman."

"I trust I do so now," says I, with a meaning he understood — that I was Paolo's captain, and no father-confessor for treason.

Yet he would not be restrained; nay, with his eyes glowing and his voice rising little by little to make itself heard above the tumult beginning to rise outside the castle walls, he told me his whole story.

YOUR Eminence, I have told it heretofore—the events as I saw them. The key only hath been lacking; and a small key will open a mighty gate. So that now I need but say that Gian, poor, inconsiderable and weak beside his seniors to the succession, had employed his very weakness against them. Aye, his flight to Monterosso had been a lure to draw his cousins into the trap; his moanings at the feet of the twain that were killed there had been to bring about their deaths; from Saverio Rastelli his "Thoughts On The Nature Of Lordship," that dull book, he had drawn arguments enow to make her Ladyship stop Roberto's voice with murder, and accuse Carlo, knowing that in the upshot either Carlo or Paolo would die.

"But merriest of all," says he, "was our tour of the country, Luigi; thou sitting thy horse so solemn and so weary, while under cover of warning the rabble against what they'd never thought of, I roused the whole countryside to revolt and crop burning—and to the slaying of Felice, my last bar but one to the throne. For d'ye know who hath been chosen by Florence for next lord? I! And by the council of nobles, seeing that I am to marry his Lordship's widow—"

Of a sudden I drew my sword. Nay, it would have taken a quicker than he to forestall me; I put the point at his breast. Outside, the mob of peasantry was howling. A red light of torches come through the arrow slits.

"His Lordship, however," says I, "is not yet dead. Whereas thou, Master Gian, shalt most like be so within the hour; and at the end of a rope."

"Within five minutes," says a voice from behind me. "But not by the rope. Stand clear, Captain."

It was Paolo. Aye, and by that it may be seen how Gian had bound me with horror; I had heard no one approach. I was past my time for taking station on the walls; so was Baltazar, God rest him; and at last, while the peasantry screamed for blood around the bastions, his Lordship and a file had come in search of us.

Two men with torches stood in the doorway and four more outside, yet Paolo gave no order of arrest. Meseemed, as I gave place to him, that he was wearier than he had been before his wine; his great face was fallen, his voice slow and his step heavy.

"This was treachery, Giovanni," says he; whereat Giovanni laughed. "Aye, and vain; for I must kill thee. As I killed poor innocent Carlo—God forgive thee."

He drew his sword; and, doing likewise, Giovanni laughed again. And there was something in his eye, small and insignificant looking as he still was, that made me rush forward and beg Paolo to let me call in the guard. For which interference he flung me stunningly against the wall and drove forward a thrust that should have sent his very hilt through Gian.

Should have! But it was instantly to be seen, even by me whose head was full of stars, that somewhere or other, how and when the devil knoweth—but as was only to be looked for—Giovanni had studied fence; not our Italian style, which hath at least the wholesome cut and thrust, but the murdering French science that went with his newfangled sword. Even against a good swordsman of the honest school, Paolo could prevail but by his strength and his ability to take wounds—cuts, I mean; with an occasional thrust in the shoulder or such. But Giovanni made no cuts; no, nor no thrusts neither; nor did he stand up like a man to Paolo his assaults. Instead, keeping his miserable thin point before him, moving it only in such a wrist circle as would just divert my lord's blade, he kept slipping around the chamber like an eel, bearing himself half crouched and easy, while his adversary roared curses at full height and slashed away like a giant.

After a little the roars diminished, so that the wild yelling from without could be heard, then that noise in its turn grew fainter to my ears, drowned by the heavy noise of Paolo his breathing. Once—when he saw me ready to stab Giovanni in the back—he tried to speak, but was past it and could only shake his head; he breathed without noise after that, save for while he would make a bull rush at Gian, and stagger back and take breaths that screamed in his throat.

Alas, I knew the signs; by now his spittle had dried in his mouth, and come out as sweat on the palms of his hands; moreover, his knees were weak under him, and he would not be seeing clear. Twice he almost dropped his sword whenas Giovanni parried it; the third time—he had stumbled against the table and almost fallen—he dropped

the blade entirely. He was stooping blindly to pick it up, when Giovanni ran him through lengthwise down the body, left the sword where it was and, disregarding his Lordship's death struggles, turned to me.

Outside the mob howled louder than ever.

"Death to tyrants!" it shouted. "Viva Giovanni."

"As next in succession to the Lordship of Pontresina," says he, scarce breathed, "I order thee, Captain, to open the gates. Let in none but armed troops under a proper banner. They should be here by now. If the peasantry intrude, fire on them if necessary. Dismissed!"

WHICH I trust hath made all clear to your Eminence; for of course I must obey orders of my lawful lord, leaving punishment of sin to his superiors in turn. And so the Florentine mercenaries and the council of nobles men marched in; and Gian became lord as he desired, and your Eminence came to Castello Vecchio for the coronation.

Reassured as to right and wrong by the presence of your Excellency—who then, on the evidence of your Reverence's face, I assumed to know everything—how joyful was I in my captaincy; such a bad year as that was! For captain, with security of tenure, I esteemed myself to be. Giovanni had confirmed my appointment, saying that all guard captains should be stupid, but that I was a pearl beyond price, scarce half an hour before I accompanied him to that supper at which your Eminence so ably exhorted him to good merciful lordship. I hear the very words now that I heard then, as I stood behind his new Lordship's chair.

"For, look you," said your Eminence, "the poor of hereabouts have been hard used. From what I hear, the county is bankrupt and a fire-swept desert."

At which his Lordship said aye, alas.

"His late Lordship, whose soul God receive, was a hard man."

"Aye," said the present lord.

"And a brutal," says your Eminence. "And those who were to have succeeded him, but for the inscrutable operations of providence, were likewise brutes—tramplers of the feeble and the lowly. It is a strange thing, my son, that over all these mighty men you should have been raised to power. A weakling by comparison; gentle; unskilled in war."

It was at this point that, nodding your Eminence's head, your Eminence drank a little wine! Valdifiore, of the vintage of 1522; the chamber groom had given me a sip before supper. And during your Excellence's last speech I had increasingly wished for more of it. My mouth was dry, and some great ball of air seemed to be gathering itself within my ribs, pushing the same very painfully against my chest armor. But it was not until a little later—when your Eminence put down the cup and spoke again—that I knew what had ailed me.

"Indeed, indeed," says your Grace, "blessed are the meek." Upon which all that air came rushing forth in the bellow of laughter which then lost me my place and sent me wandering amid *condottieri;* and which now, after fifty years, seemeth still to put me in danger of the hangman's knot. Alas! Alas!

Praying your Excellence's Eminence to accept the which in explanation, for that my hand can compass no more, no, not a word, and once more kissing the hand and Sacred Purple of your Excellence's Eminence I subscribe myself humbly,

The humble and everpraying most obliged servant of your Excellence,

—L. CARADOSSO

Post Scriptum: If the report erred, and the hanging hath to do with the man that died after a sword fight in the Via Nuova in Rometia, last eleventh of April, let your Grace but tell me, and I will explain that also.

Again with humblest reverence and kissing, etc., etc.—L. C.

WINDS ALOFT

By the Author of "The Balloonatic"

LELAND S. JAMIESON

McAULIFFE was down in the basket, sitting grotesquely with his legs crumpled under him. His hands, at the ends of feelingless arms, lay limp across his thighs. Now and then he shifted his eyes to look at them; and then, his eyeballs peculiarly glazed, he stared across that narrow space at Brent.

Brent himself had been unable, the last three schedules, to summon energy with which to press the key. Pressing it, sending signals down to the radio station 25,000 feet below them, seemed unimportant anyhow. The important thing was to get back the strength to stand, then reach up and pull the valve cord. Twice he had tried, both times unsuccessfully.

Lieutenant McAuliffe, Bill Brent saw, was panting now, his chest heaving in repeated, frenzied efforts to suck in quantities of air, to inhale sufficient oxygen by which to live. But that seemed unimportant, too, to Brent. The thing was to reach that valve cord. They would die soon if he failed in that. The balloon would continue to ascend; they would slip into a stupor, and death would take them long before the balloon settled down into an altitude where the

air would let them live.

It was all a haze. The situation was desperate, and yet Brent felt no particular apprehension, knowing it. He tried to rise. He tried to lift one hand, grasp the basket rim and raise himself, but the hand was leaden, too heavy for his strength. He could still think. And he still had a dogged determination not to give up. Giving up would kill himself and McAuliffe. He must reach the valve cord. McAuliffe was almost helpless. . . .

McAuliffe, Bill Brent then saw, was unconscious! His head had slumped forward on his chest and his breathing was no longer quite so violent. Brent, after a long, exhausting struggle, somehow raised his hand. He closed frozen fingers on the basket rim. Trembling with the effort, he tried to rise.

But he was too weak. The valve cord was four feet above his hand, and he was powerless to help himself. The clouds, he saw through blurring eyes, were white, flat and brilliant in the sun, a long, long way below. Somewhere beneath them was the earth. There was a haze on the horizon and, almost level with the balloon now, were little ribbons of cirrous clouds, ice particles that floated in this thin and sterile atmosphere.

Above them was the sun, close, yet remote and cold. Brent's fingers slowly loosed the basket rim. He was gasping now, exhausted by the effort. McAuliffe, unconscious or perhaps even dying, sat as he had when he collapsed, dropping his head and closing his eyes.

The thin, vague thought assailed Bill Brent that he did not want to die. He must do something; but he was powerless to move. He sank back to the bottom of the basket, his ears drumming with a distant, constant hum. He was extremely, awfully, tired. He closed his eyes.

The universe became a gulf of black around him.

The balloon continued its steady, gradual ascent.

SECOND LIEUTENANT William Brent, that year, had won a place as alternate aide in the Gordon Bennett Cup balloon race. He reported to Scott Field from Fort Breckenridge, and there met the alternate pilot, First Lieutenant McAuliffe. McAuliffe introduced him to the regular team—Captain Carl Kelser, pilot, and First Lieutenant John Hager, aide. That evening, at the officers' club, he met the teams of the other sixteen entries.

The British team—Flight Officers Witherspoon and White—in the course of the evening made it plain in Bill Brent's presence that they thought contemptuously of the U. S. Army's chances against them; and Brent, promptly and with considerable heat, took exception to any such attitude. Witherspoon, a tall, cadaverous looking man, said pointedly—

"Oh, I say, Brent, would you care to make a wager on the outcome?"

And Brent snapped, with characteristic emphasis and lack of foresight:

"You mean a bet? Certainly. Put up your dough."

The Britishers, it developed, between them had something like five hundred pounds. Brent had almost six hundred dollars. He bet five hundred, and they agreed upon the club mess officer as stakes holder; Brent promised to be back the next morning to take all the cash Witherspoon and White might care to put up on themselves.

He had seen the British balloon. It was small, of heavy construction. He could not see how by any stroke of luck it could beat the big new Army entry.

The next morning he declared to McAuliffe:

"Why, Mac, these guys are suckers! They haven't any more chance to win with that old bubble than I would have with a glider. Here's where we pick up a nice piece of change. Kelser and Hager will beat Witherspoon by three hundred miles. How much do you want to take on—our team against theirs?"

He didn't, McAuliffe made it plain, care to enter into any wagers.

"A balloon race," he pointed out, "is in the lap of the gods from the take-off."

"But we can mop up the dough!" Brent insisted. "It's so easy it's pitiful!"

So in the end McAuliffe put up three hundred dollars. Brent, jubilant over his prospects, indignant that Witherspoon and White had such scorn for the Americans' ability, went about the post arguing and cajoling. By the end of that day he had collected two thousand dollars to be put up against the British team. He would send them home flat broke or know the reason why!

The next morning he knew the reason why, and knew that the score or so of Scott Field officers might as well kiss their money goodby, without tears. For it was already as good as gone. Kelser and Hager, no matter how skilful, couldn't possibly beat Witherspoon and White.

For early that morning a truck had pulled up to the starting plot on the field, and from it had been unloaded crates in profusion. From the crates, eventually, had emerged a new, massive 80,000 cubic foot balloon, made of the lightest possible material—varnished silk. It was a work of art, a beautiful thing. This, inquiry disclosed, was the actual British entry; the smaller balloon was only a reserve craft for use in case the better one failed to arrive in time. Brent, in a black rage, sought Witherspoon and White.

"The bets are off!" he snapped. "You misrepresented your entry. We'll go back and get our money."

There was a painful silence. Witherspoon and Brent stood in a slowly closing circle of officers, with enlisted men on the outer fringes.

"My dear fellow," Witherspoon returned, triumph but thinly concealed, "I beg to point out that I have misrepresented nothing. Never at any time did I tell you that the smaller balloon was my entry. You simply inferred it, old chap. And the bets are not off, I must therefore remind you."

Brent could see nothing but Witherspoon's long, angular face. As he looked into Witherspoon's green eyes, a tremor of rising anger grew and grew and took possession of him. He was, he realized, shaking violently and could do nothing about it. He wanted more than he had ever wanted anything to smash Witherspoon's long teeth down his throat. In all probability he would have done so if McAuliffe had not touched his shoulder.

"Careful!" McAuliffe warned in a hoarse whisper. "Congress made you a gentleman."

The tremor continued. Brent, his arms rigid at his sides, his fists clenched, glared at Flight Officer Witherspoon, and his breath came with a sharp, sibilant sound.

"I'll get you!" he threatened. "We'll beat you if I have to drag you out of your basket!"

Witherspoon smiled in deliberate, simulated amusement.

"A most unfortunate remark, old fellow," he said. "If anything should happen to my balloon, now, I can insist that the race committee disqualify your team, and I shall consider it my prerogative to do so. Furthermore, at this time, I shall present to the committee your threat, substantiated by Flight Officer White, and you will be removed from the Army team. In the future, old fellow, it might be a shade to your advantage to talk more graciously."

He would have turned on his heel, but Brent stopped him. Brent reached out a chunky hand, gripped Witherspoon by the tunic and whirled him about.

"Quite a sportsman!" Brent snarled. "You won't get me disqualified—I've already withdrawn. And now I'll make a bet with you—I'll bet you five hundred dollars against that old balloon of yours that you don't win. You low, cheating—"

"You raving idiot!" McAuliffe cut

Brent short and jerked him away into the crowd. "Get out of here. You haven't a grain of sense in your head and never did have. Why—why I ought to put a gag on you to close that yap before it gets you hung!"

THEY walked back to the club, and Bill Brent, as they went through the slick mud of the field, fell into a state of despair. Always he was quick-tempered. Always he was saying or doing things which led to trouble. Now, like a fool, he had gotten himself disqualified. If for any reason whatever Witherspoon's new balloon developed trouble, Witherspoon could—and he seemed to be the type of man who would—protest to the race committee and the Army entry would be disqualified. If he hadn't been a member of the team, it would have been different.

He cursed darkly, berating himself, as they trudged across the field. Finally McAuliffe, who understood Brent fairly well and liked him, put in:

"Forget that part of it, old man. I'm the same way myself sometimes. I understand pretty well how you feel. But we've got to get our heads together. We're in big trouble! Do you realize that every spare dollar of almost every officer at this post is on Kelser and Hager? This outfit will look like Rome-after-the-Vandals if Witherspoon wins. He's got a handicap, now, too. Think, Bill; get that old bean working!"

Captain Kelser and Lieutenant Hager were in the officers' club. Brent, morose and saturnine, broke the news.

"Well, I'm off the team. I shot off my mouth, and now I'm disqualified." He sank into a sullen silence.

McAuliffe explained what had happened, describing the new balloon, and what it meant to Kelser and Hager; what it meant, in fact, to the majority of the officers of Scott Field. It was, McAuliffe finished, a major catastrophe.

Brent broke in:

"It was all my fault, this orgy of betting. I started it and talked everybody else into it. I'm responsible, and I've got to do something. I feel like hell because all the fellows are going to lose their money, sure as the devil—"

Captain Kelser, a great hulk of a man with a forbidding aspect even when in a good humor, cut in—

"Well, kid, you may feel like hell now; but you're in the height of health compared to what you'll be when everybody around here gets through with you!"

"What are you going to do?" Lieutenant Hager, a short, thick man, asked.

Bill Brent passed a trembling hand over his slick black hair. He licked his lips. On his face was a look of consternation.

"I don't know. But we can't let these doublecrossers break every man on the post."

Captain Kelser got up.

"To that end, Henry," he said to Hager, "we'd better check our equipment again . . . Brent, you always were an imbecile!"

Desolate, fidgeting with poorly suppressed and constantly increasing agitation, Brent finally suggested that he and McAuliffe go back to the field.

The British entry had been unpacked and was now in the front row of balloons, shiny and resplendent, no bigger than the Army entry, but much lighter. Brent stood at a distance, watching it, and a wave of desperation swept him into a cold sweat.

A spattering of rain fell, then ceased abruptly. The morning was drab, overcast with low clouds which had clung close to the earth unpenetrated by the sun for more than a week. It had rained for two days before, but not, until now, on this morning. The clouds showed no signs of breaking up. It might be possible, Brent considered, that the race would be postponed because of weather, and he suggested this to McAuliffe. But the latter assured him there would be no chance of that.

As they moved on from the British

balloon to the others, McAuliffe explained that for the first time in the history of balloon racing, radio reception was being brought into use. The French entry was equipped with a receiver, so that its pilot could obtain reports on upper winds and weather from commercial ground stations while in flight.

"Quite," McAuliffe said, "a splendid idea. Next year they'll all be doing it."

Another light sprinkle of rain fell just then, and Brent looked up at the clouds. They were quite low—possibly six or seven hundred feet above the ground.

"There'll be no winds aloft today," Brent said. "That radio won't do them any good. Everybody will fly low, probably; the air will be stable."

He walked on, cudgeling his brain to find some way out of the predicament into which he had plunged himself, his team and his friends upon the post. Suddenly he halted and swung almost violently upon McAuliffe.

"Hey!" he cried. "I've got it! I've got the dope that will put those Limeys in the well!"

"Spring it," McAuliffe prompted.

"There'll be no wind aloft reports today!" Brent went on quickly, his words tumbling from his lips. "There's too low a ceiling. This weather condition extends in all directions, from the looks of this morning's weather map, for several hundred miles. But I've doped out a way to get those winds aloft, so Kelser and Hager will have the benefit of them! They can win in a walk if I can do it."

"Granted," McAuliffe agreed. "But you can't get winds above the cloud level; and with an 800-foot ceiling, how the devil—"

"Radio!" snapped Brent excitedly. "Listen: If you and I go up in another balloon, carrying a radio transmitter, we can send messages at regular intervals, giving our altitude. A station on the ground, using a direction finder, can triangulate our position and figure out the direction and velocity of the winds up in the clouds. Then they can broadcast the results, and Kelser can go to the best altitude and stay there. Witherspoon won't know where the best wind is because he won't have a radio. The Frenchmen will get the broadcast too, but I don't think they have a chance to win."

There were, McAuliffe admitted, possibilities in the thought.

"But," he went on, "there are a lot of obstacles. We'd have to hunt up a receiver for Kelser. There'd be a damn bad fire hazard from a transmitter, around all that hydrogen. And besides that—"

"We haven't much time," Brent interrupted. "This thing will work, and we'll have to step to get things ready soon enough. We have to get a balloon, for one thing."

"You'll never get it done in time," McAuliffe said. "But we can try."

He had been looking at the big, new British balloon as he spoke. When he turned back to Brent, he found that he had been talking to thin air. For Brent was gone, running through the mud in the direction of the hangar line, looking neither to right nor left and splashing mud at every step. McAuliffe shook his head. They wouldn't, he was afraid, have a chance to get it all done.

MIRACLES do happen, even in the Air Service; and they happened that afternoon. Brent went back to Flight Officer Witherspoon and offered an apology. The Britisher was not really vindictive; he simply knew he was easily in line to make two thousand dollars or more, and he was sticking by his guns. But under Brent's arguments he withdrew his protest with the race committee. Then, because this matter had become quite personal between them, he offered, at Brent's reminder of it, to accept the bet that Brent had made—his balloon against five hundred dollars—with the stipulation that Brent and McAuliffe would be permitted to race it against him. If they beat him,

he would lose all bets. If Kelser beat him and McAuliffe and Brent didn't, he would lose all bets except that of the balloon.

It was a little involved. But it had to be, because the Army craft was the American entry in this international race, and there could be but one. But Brent, at all costs, had to get into the air somehow; and this private race with Witherspoon was his only opportunity. Witherspoon laughed uproariously, immoderately, at the suggestion. Racing that old balloon against his new lightweight one was a joke. The genius, he said, of a fool. But since there was money in it, he saw no reason not to take it while he could.

After that was accomplished, by devious means and by help from half a dozen sergeants on the field, Brent obtained a small, lightweight, battery-powered transmitter. He procured two receivers. One of these he had installed in the official Army balloon. The other, and the transmitter, were put into the new and private race entry, Witherspoon's old craft.

It was perfectly legal, for there was no race regulation that a balloonist might not employ radio. The fact that only two did so was because the others had no confidence in it. The broadcasts would be made to all and sundry, and those who cared to hear them could use receivers if they chose.

Within four hours these preparations were complete and the race was starting. Standing in the basket with McAuliffe just before the take-off, Brent looked gloomily about him at the faces of the spectators. He had poured good money after bad—borrowed money this time—in an effort to retrieve several officers from financial ruin into which he had precipitated them. If he could not help Kelser win, he himself would lose five hundred borrowed dollars, plus five hundred of his own. Of course, he had no thought of really racing Witherspoon; that had merely been a talking reason for getting in the air; he was really only paying five hundred for the use of this balloon and, since its use would save the first bet, one was hedged against the other. Brent's sole mission was to take off and ascend straight up until he found a strong wind into which Kelser and Hager could climb and ride upon until they won. But Witherspoon, of course, did not suspect this.

The starter called orders in a blatant voice, and the timer took his position in front of the first balloon before the grandstand—Dandelot in the French entry. There was a low command, and the French craft slid upward in the air. One after the other, from the starting position, sixteen balloons went off, climbing and moving majestically toward the southwest, flying low, some of them just above the earth and others almost brushing the clouds.

Brent's craft, the seventeenth, took off in turn. McAuliffe was flying it, and Brent, stop-watch in hand, was crouched over the transmitter in the corner, his hand poised on the key. They went up slowly, in a controlled and constant climb.

Brent pressed the key and sent out the short message in plain code: the time check signal; and, "S-e-v-e-n h-u-n-d-r-e-d."

The balloon, just then, slid into the gray mass of cloud which formed the ceiling; and the brown earth disappeared, leaving them in a smother of dark mist which condensed slowly upon the bulging sides of the envelop and later ran down into the basket, drenching both men with moisture. McAuliffe watched his instruments and dumped sand in small scoopfuls at short intervals. Brent pressed the key again, to allow the ground station operator to check the time, and followed it:

"S-i-x-t-e-e-n h-u-n-d-r-e-d."

Almost immediately thereafter came the broadcast he had been waiting for. The wind velocity for the first observation was being sent to Kelser! Bill Brent, tense and rigid, listened to the words, and a thrill of triumph made him

forget for an instant the stakes—as well as his personal feelings and standing as an officer—which hinged upon this race:

"Kay-Dee-Pee-Double-U, calling all balloons: Kay-Dee-Pee-Double-U, calling all balloons: Winds aloft at 700 feet, north-northeast 14—winds aloft at 700 feet, north-northeast 14. Repeating—"

Bill Brent listened. The voice stopped, and the second hand of Brent's watch came once more around the dial. He pressed the key and sent his altitude. Then, straightening for a moment, he looked up, his vision cut off by the rounding bulge of the balloon. The mist was no lighter above him than below. It was gloomy, almost dark, inside those clouds.

"Working?" McAuliffe asked, his eyes still glued to his instruments. "Have they broadcast yet?"

"Have they!" Brent cried. "Mac, this is uncanny! Sit right up here and hear them tell Kelser what the wind is in these clouds. I'm telling you!"

"You don't have to be telling me," McAuliffe said. "You just see to it that I get my money back." He took the headphones for a moment and listened to the broadcast:

"Kay-Dee-Pee-Double-U, to all balloons . . ." It was repeated. "Winds at 1600—1600, northeast 9—northeast 9. Next report one minute."

They went up steadily to 11,000 feet, sending their altitude at regular intervals and listening with rapt attention to each broadcast which was sent from the ground station. This, through their own receiving set, was like watching the race in actuality; they were familiar enough with Kelser's method of flying to be able to visualize the Army craft drifting through the air, followed at constantly greater space by the other fifteen contestants.

That was the way they had it visualized. But it wasn't, they learned a moment later, the way the race was being run. At no point thus far had a wind of more than 12 miles an hour been broadcast to Kelser, even up to eleven thousand feet above the earth. Kelser, with a 14-mile wind at the cloud base, naturally stayed low. Brent had made arrangements to send his time checks and altitudes up to and including 15,000 feet. Just after he had passed that altitude and had sent the signal, he heard the broadcast to Kelser:

"Wind east-southeast 6. Repeating—"

Following that closely were these words:

"Ladies and gentlemen of our radio audience, perhaps you have been listening to the broadcasting of winds aloft to the balloonists in the Gordon Bennett Cup contest. These have been put on the air by special arrangement with your station, Kay-Dee-Pee-Double-U. We are now privileged to present to you a description of the race itself, with the positions of the contestants—"

The voice droned on, describing the start of the race in graphic words. But Bill Brent, with a feeling of frustration at the realization that there was no appreciable wind anywhere within these clouds, shoved the headphones from his ears and turned to McAuliffe, who was looking up through the mist at the steadily increasing light spot which appeared as they neared the top of the clouds.

"We're sunk," Brent said in despair. "There's no wind anywhere! Witherspoon and White will take this race in a walk-away." He stood erect and wiped beads of moisture from his face. "There's not a cockeyed thing we can do about it, either. I'm just a plain damn fool!"

Through the radio, just then, he heard the name of Flight Officer Witherspoon mentioned. He snapped one earphone from the headset and handed it to McAuliffe, and held the other one so he himself could hear.

"—the contestants are widely separated now," the radio informed them. "Flight Officers Witherspoon and White, in the British balloon, are at least ten

miles in the lead as the Mississippi River has been reached. Dandelot, in the French craft, has second place at the moment. Captain Kelser of the American Army is in third place. But the race, remember, is just starting. It may last two entire days! It is anybody's race right now, and the balloonists are fighting hard for a substantial lead which—"

As the balloon broke through the clouds into bright sunlight, Bill Brent and McAuliffe for a moment stopped listening to the account. To know that their efforts had been wasted, that Kelser was being badly beaten by Witherspoon, left them almost nauseated by an intense hopelessness. They looked out across the sea of mist, smooth and white as far as they could see.

"We might just as well go down," McAuliffe said. "I know when I'm licked. There's no doubt about it now. Witherspoon is already in the lead. He has a thousand pounds more ballast than Kelser and can stay up probably twelve hours longer. It looks to me like that writes finis on us, Bill."

Bill Brent nodded absently and stood looking at the scene below him. They had ascended through clouds from 700 feet, and the altimeter now recorded 15,400. There had been six distinct layers in the cloud formation before they emerged finally into clear air with the sun above them. Yet there was one more mist formation, high above their heads, and Brent was watching this intently—as much of it as he could see beyond the bulging equator of the balloon. Suddenly he asked—

"How high is that thin, lacy stuff up there—those cirrous clouds?"

"No telling," McAuliffe answered, squinting upward. "20,000, possibly. Maybe more. Take one final observation with the radio—send one more signal—and if we don't find we've picked up a little wind on top, at this altitude, we'll valve."

Brent was slow in answering, his eyes fixed upon the cirrous formation higher up. Soon he cried:

"I don't need to send any signals to know we've got a wind up there! Mac, just sight on the side of the bag and watch those babies go!"

McAuliffe sighted, and, while he was doing so, Brent knelt at the transmitter and sent this message to the ground station:

"Will resume time signals in few minutes. Cloud formation at high altitude indicates violent wind from southwest. Please stand by to take readings and transmit."

McAULIFFE dropped sand in a thin yellow stream, one bag after another. The balloon climbed, and the spirits of both men soared with it in a wild excitement. They knew beyond all doubt that there was wind—great quantities of wind—at some level still quite high above them. If they could reach that level and have the velocity of the wind measured, and then get this fact to Kelser, Kelser would win.

"Step on it," Brent admonished. "Kelser and Hager will be getting pretty far from the radio station by this time. If they should be too far away to hear the broadcast, it would be too bad!"

McAuliffe poured sand faster. The altimeter crept around the dial to 16,000 . . . 17,000 . . . 18,000. Still the cirrous clouds were high above them.

It was growing cold, and Brent's teeth chattered. Beads of moisture on the rigging changed suddenly to pellets of hard ice. McAuliffe, when he was not dumping sand, stood looking at the sea of clouds below, dazzling in the sunlight, and rubbed his hands together to stimulate his circulation. They had brought extra flying clothes, and now got into them.

When he was dressed, Brent sent down a time signal from 19,000 feet. McAuliffe climbed. At 20,000 Brent radioed once more, and then stood listening to the report which should come up from the radio. It came to his

ears at last.

"Kay-Dee-Pee-Double-U, calling all balloons: Kay-Dee-Pee-Double-U, calling all balloons. Continuing winds aloft. Continuing winds aloft. Winds at 19,000 feet, southwest 23. 19,000, southwest 23. Stand by for more reports, Bleee-rut. Keoooooteee. Eeeeoooo-tuk, Skuk. Ladies and gentlemen, you have just been listening—"

"Turn the damn thing off!" McAuliffe said in disgust. "I'm going down. 23 miles an hour will never win a race today, up here."

But Brent continued listening.

"Keep climbing, Mac," he said. "We've got to find more wind, and there's more up there. 23 miles an hour isn't enough; and besides, it's blowing the wrong way—he's already down near the river, and this would only bring him back—but there's enough wind up there somewhere to make it really pay."

So they continued to climb. Brent sent his signals at each thousand-foot elevation, and reports filtered back to him at intervals. The wind at 20,000 was southwest 34. At 21,000, southwest 41. At 22,000, southwest 53.

That was more like it! They kept up the steady climb, to go as high as possible with this small balloon of Witherspoon's. If they could find, as they knew they might today, a southwest wind of 70 or 80 miles an hour—such winds are not at all uncommon*—Kelser would go up into it and, in a few hours at that extreme altitude, make enough distance to win the race easily. But a 53-mile wind would not do it. They needed more.

The radio began to fade at 23,000 feet. Brent could hear the mumbling of words, but the text was utterly unintelligible. Bending over the receiver, he worked with its adjustments, his hands so cold that they were slow and awkward, almost useless. But that did no good. He turned around to ask a question of McAuliffe, and the sight of McAuliffe struck him with a stab of fear. For the other had slumped against a corner stay, one hand holding to the basket rim and one hand clutching the valve cord.

McAuliffe's hands were blue with cold; his face was drawn and rigid. And he said, in a voice almost inaudible:

"I never could stand much altitude. No oxygen—to—breathe." The last word trailed away.

Brent forgot the radio, the race. He reached across to help McAuliffe, and found to his dismay that his own arms were almost numb, without the strength to hold the other man. But he did grasp McAuliffe by the armpits and ease him down to a sitting position in the basket. He knelt over McAuliffe and put questions—questions oddly muffled even to his own ears. He looked at the altimeter and couldn't see it very well. It read, he thought, about 25,000 feet now. But he wasn't sure.

"Mac," he mumbled, "you'll be all right. I'll valve. Just rest. Just take things easy. We'll be all right. We'll go down when I valve."

HE TRIED to rise, to reach the valve cord. His eyes were blurring with increased rapidity, and he could scarcely see the cord. And then he found that it was impossible to lift himself. He couldn't stand! The exertion of helping McAuliffe to the basket floor had exhausted him completely. With hands, arms, even his legs numb and almost devoid of feeling, he leaned back and slumped upon the floor, sitting across from the other man in a state of torpor.

His mind, even yet, was active; he could think and could realize how fatal this predicament might be. He didn't know how much sand McAuliffe had dropped just before he collapsed from the effects of reduced pressure and lack of oxygen at this high altitude. He didn't know how far the balloon would continue to ascend before it reached its

* Sounding balloon observations at high altitudes have shown the presence of 100-150 m. p. h. winds on numerous occasions; sometimes, but more rarely, approaching 200 m. p. h.

point of equilibrium, how long it would remain there before the effect of seepage through the envelop allowed it to descend. But he knew that descent, when it came, would be slow. He knew that seepage, loss of gas through the pores of the balloon cloth, would take a long, long time. And meanwhile they would retain this too-great altitude.

His eyes were in bad condition now, and he had difficulty focusing them upon McAuliffe's face. The altimeter dial was nothing but a blur. He concentrated the full power of his mind upon the valve cord, upon a determination to summon all his strength and stand, to pull it down, before it was too late.

The radio earphones, still on his head, erupted a strident tone just then, the effects of fading past.

"—the British entry, with Flight Officers Witherspoon and White, has just been sighted beyond Sulphur Springs. The U. S. entry, with Captain Kelser and Lieutenant Hager, is now in second place, but they have fallen farther behind. It looks like this old race is going to the British this year! But it is a great race, and all of us are pulling for—" The fading came again and blotted out the rest of it.

McAuliffe, Brent could see, was panting now, his chest heaving in an effort to suck into his lungs sufficient oxygen to give him life. And a flood of dull anxiety swept Bill Brent. Perceptions, in his present state, were out of focus, out of perspective. His anxiety was about the valve cord; it was the important thing; nothing else on earth mattered the least bit. But through Brent's mind ran the thought a moment later that McAuliffe was not comfortable, and that he should, if possible, do something for the other man.

Minutes passed, while Brent rested his exhausted, weary body. Then, at last, he forced himself to lift his hand. In a haze, mentally and visually, he tried to lift his body. He got up halfway, unsteadily, gropingly, like an old man who has lost control of the muscles of his legs and arms. But his body was far too heavy for his strength. He got one glimpse of the white, blurred clouds so far below, and then collapsed once more. The jar somehow readjusted his eyes for an instant, and he saw McAuliffe clearly. Mac's head was slumped forward on his chest. Unconscious! He might, Brent knew in the haze that seemed to fog his mental channels, be dead even now.

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered now. Brent felt cold, and yet, peculiarly, quite comfortable. An enveloping lethargy had taken hold of him, and he sank back to rest, his mind still functioning in a blur of short, disordered, dull perceptions. They would go on climbing, with no oxygen to breathe. Finally he would slide into unconsciousness. It didn't make much difference; it was an easy way to die.

That word—the actual realization of impending death—was for a moment a harsh stimulant. Even in this dormant, dazed condition, Bill Brent did not want to die. He was just beginning life. He couldn't die; not yet, at least. With groping, awful effort, he made one last attempt to place his blue hand upon the basket rim.

He did, at last, after half a dozen trials. He tried once more to rise, to reach up and tug upon the valve. But once more he slipped down and lay exhausted on the basket floor. He couldn't see McAuliffe now, at all. He realized slowly that he had gone blind; and with that realization he knew that hope was gone. There was no use to try again; he couldn't see the basket rim. It didn't seem so frightening to know that he must die, now that death was actually in front of him. He closed his eyelids. His head drooped. A gulf of emptiness took full possession of his brain.

The balloon went serenely on. It climbed, for McAuliffe had dropped a lot of ballast just before the torpor struck him. The altimeter, in this cold, thin air, crawled around the dial to

27,000 feet.

But there it stopped. The balloon had passed its point of equilibrium, and settled slowly for 1,000 feet, and then once more climbed a little. At 26,400 it held steady. It drifted with a constant speed.

But at last it lost gas through seepage and began a gradual descent. At 24,000 feet Bill Brent realized that he was not dead. He opened his eyes, but was still blind.

Sight returned ten minutes later, and Brent saw that it was night. He waited a long time, then spoke. McAuliffe, in a distant voice, replied. McAuliffe asked:

"What time is it? I can't see anything."

With an effort Bill Brent read the glowing figures on his watch.

"10:20," he said. "I'm tired. I think I'll go to sleep again. You feel all right?"

"Weak," McAuliffe admitted. "Can't move. Cold, too. But too weak to worry about being cold."

When Brent awoke once more the moon was a golden spectacle above the clouds; and the clouds, so far below, unbroken as far as he could see, were silvery and ghost-like. It was one o'clock. It occurred to Brent that they had better land; he had no idea of where they were, of what was under them. And then he considered that it might be better to wait until daylight before they tried to find the ground. It wasn't so uncomfortable now; it wasn't really freezing. He went to sleep once more without disturbing McAuliffe. It is doubtful if he could have summoned the strength to reach the valve cord anyhow.

Throughout the night they drifted; and when, in the thin dawn, they awoke once more, they were buried somewhere in the clouds. They felt better, although they were weak from exposure, hunger, and the ordeal they so narrowly had struggled through. McAuliffe staggered to his feet, looked at the instruments and valved.

They broke through the base of clouds at 1500 feet, and there, below them, was the gray contour of a hilly country. They picked a spot and landed. McAuliffe, when they had crawled from the basket, asked:

"I wonder how Kelser and Witherspoon came out? And I wonder where the hell we are?"

They were not to know about Kelser until later. They themselves, they learned from an early-rising farmer, were ten miles from Van Buren, Maine.

IN THE officers' club at Scott Field once more—it took them four days to get back there on the train—Brent and McAuliffe sat with Captain Kelser and Lieutenant Hager and a dozen other officers.

"Yes, Witherspoon won the race, all right," Kelser rumbled. "Hell, he beat Hager and me by two hundred miles! I heard the first radio reports, but the winds were worse up in the clouds than down where I was flying, so I stayed low. We had gone too far away, by the time the really high winds were broadcast, to hear them." He paused and laughed deeply; then added, "But Witherspoon was green around the gills, although he turned out a good sport after all. He stayed up two days, made a thousand miles and thought he'd set a record and won a lot of dough. Then you popped up with better than 1200 miles made in fifteen hours—at almost 90 miles an hour! Was he sore—whew! But he paid off like a man."

"I've got a free balloon I'll sell," Bill Brent declared. "No reasonable offer, cash, refused! I don't know what the devil I'll use it for at Fort Breckenridge."

"Race it," Lieutenant Hager said dryly. "Any guy who can beat the winner of the Gordon Bennett race, with the winner's own balloon, and sleep while he's doing it, certainly shows some talent for the game, I think."

Today's Raw Bronc

(Meet the Cow)

AS TOLD BY GIL STRICK
TO FREDERIC MERTZ

Gargan's Ranch,
R F. D. 5,
Montelindo, Calif.

DEAR Mr. Strick:

You must not be surprised if a girl gets a little inquisitive about the friend of a friend. This R. C. Thomas was brought up to the ranch-house with lacerations, contusions and a broken thumb. Also high blood pressure. And he seems to be sure that you are at the bottom of his troubles. Part of the time he says—

"If ever I get within a hundred miles of that guy—"

And then again he laughs in a way that would be pretty sarcastic except for the bandages on his face. He raves about correspondence school horse-breaking; but the worst temperature he runs is when he mentions your name. He seems to think it is your fault that the cow bit him.

Now I am not nosey, being of a retiring disposition, though well liked by true friends. But a girl could help Mr. Thomas get out of his state of mind and think thoughts that would improve his condition if I knew what this was all about. Maybe you would have an idea.

Sincerely yours,

—LUCILE G.

* * *

Santa Ysabel, Calif.

DEAR Miss Lucile:

I was scared that it would happen. Twice before this R. C. Thomas has broke into print at the head of my articles, and I have had to take up valuable space, pointing out what trouble would come down on him if he got too hasty in the cow horse business. Apparently he is just one of those boys like in the old saying, "A horse can lead you to water, but it is your own fault if you drink."

The plain truth is, Miss Lucile, that most of a cow horse's training has come to him before he ever looks at a cow. I thought I had explained this so that people like Friend Thomas would go

into horse-breaking more deliberate. But even if he had followed all my instructions he could not have protected himself against all surprises. You see, a cow horse has got to settle down to his new profession in his own way.

Maybe you can explain this to him better than I can if you tell him the story of Tiny Hyde.

This Tiny was a 275-pound boy off Lone Pine Reservation, and he figured he could take short cuts to rodeo prizes the same as Friend Thomas seems to have had in mind. Tiny used to ride a big bay five-year-old with notions of his own that were maybe a shade clearer than his rider's. Anyhow, the horse was a newcomer to cattle business when Tiny got into a debate with him on the edge of a herd over in Rodriguez Canyon.

It was Tiny's idea that he and the bay were helping to run a big whiteface out from the bunch. Tiny was trying to hold back the other cattle and he was making a big play with the reins. A horse moving eight inches to one side or the other will give a cow an opening to go through and will still be in position to block any others that decide to follow. Well, this cow broke out, and it was Tiny's big bay that did the following.

Now, it is downright humiliating to a cowboy when a horse follows a cow against orders. You can make Friend Thomas feel a lot easier by explaining what happened to Tiny. He pulled his horse around in front of the whiteface and bumped her. And when the dust blew along, there was Tiny, face down, draped over the back of that cow.

He couldn't make a move to get off on account of all the wind that was gone out of him. So she raised up and jolted him with some fancy bucking, and while he was clawing the air for a place to land she made a turn without him, and came back to show him that she could be ornery too. If it hadn't been for outside interference she would have hooked those horns of hers right through Tiny's pants. And if you think it will make Friend Thomas any happier you can tell this story like Tiny was me instead of the other cowboy that rode between.

Probably Tiny's little ride wasn't so different from what happened to Friend Thomas; and I am sure he is getting the right treatment at your ranchhouse. But once in awhile a man will find that he is riding one of these cow-following cayuses, so you had better tell R. C. what is the right treatment for the horse.

A small rope is fastened around his neck (Westerners call it a choke rope) and a thirty-foot riata is tied through to the saddle-horn. Then you lasso the cow and step off your horse, leaving him to fight things out and see how he likes the trouble he's got himself into. I have seen this done with some of the best known cutting horses and rope horses in the country, but I have never heard of a horse or cow that was crippled from it. Be sure to tell this to Friend Thomas, because I am not aiming to hit up his temperature pressure by cruelty to animals or anything like that.

Generally the cow will jerk the horse down first. Then the horse gets mad, pulls himself together and jerks the cow as she starts to run away. Sometimes they pull each other over; and sometimes the cow will throw herself down without any help. Anyhow, in ten minutes or so she generally gets annoyed. She'll snort and blow; and after that signal the wise cayuse comes to his senses. If he's been brought up right, he'll stand with his head toward the cow, handling his hoofs like cat's paws because he has learned to step around the rope instead of over it.

When the cow runs, he remembers to keep his head toward the rope instead of his side or his tail. When she makes a pass to hook him, he lets her go by, turns with the rope and stops her. I believe that your patient would never have got himself into this trouble if he

had stepped off before the cow offered to bite him. A lone tussle, like this I have recommended, is fine for bringing a stubborn horse to his senses. You can not reform him by letting cows bite you in the leg.

After a horse has had to fight it out for a half hour with a cow, he has learned a lesson that he won't forget. Within a day or two, when herd is being gathered again and you ride him out to work, you will be surprised to see how easy he manages. But, of course, from what you have written, I figure that a day or two is not going to be long enough for Friend Thomas, no matter how sarcastic he laughs into his bandages.

As this sound can not be pleasant for a refined young lady to hear day after day, I will give you some subjects that you can use to head him off when he gets these attacks. For instance, you might tell him that in cutting a bunch of cattle a horse is likely to be confused as to which cow he is supposed to pull out. This gets him hot and mad, and a rider should overcome this by taking his horse out to the edge of the herd for a rest. This way of humoring a cayuse that's meeting hoof-beef for the first time should go on for a week or even more.

Friend Thomas may believe that this slows up things too much, but he has got more than a week to regret that he didn't do it.

The truth is, Miss Lucile, I don't know what the man expects. You might ask him. If he has followed all my directions he has got a cow horse that is just about fully educated. It should be able to carry and handle anything from a Texas grazer-bit to a Mexican bear-trap bit.

He should take any kind of Western saddle, whether double or single rig; he should be able to carry calves if necessary; to act reasonable under pack and saddle; to open and close gates; to handle himself without fuss when he parts or herds cattle; to stand easy while being shod; to run in brush and rocks almost as well as on the level; to rope calves or big stock; and finally, to eat well.

When a cow pony can be depended on to do all these things, he is just about the best friend in the business; and I would hate to have Friend Thomas go around spreading the wrong ideas because he got into this line a little too hasty.

Time and liniment will make him see things different. Then he will be proud he took up this raw bronc and turned it into a useful cow-pony and a good citizen.

Hoping you can do the same with him, when his sarcasm and broken thumb are all healed up,

I remain,

Resp'f'ly,

—G. STRICK

By the Author of "Calvert of Allobar"

Buried Out

By ROBERT SIMPSON

RIVULETS of sweat trickled down the shiny black backs of Radnor's canoeboys. Their single bladed paddles lifted and fell with rhythmic and tireless monotony, stabbing at the sullen water of Oagbi Creek as if they were trying to hurl it bodily behind the tail of the canoe.

The dull green mangroves that curtained both sides of the creek hung endlessly on just as they had ever since Radnor's journey from Dannatown to Maridi had begun two days before. And though a grass awning over the canoe's little deck amidships protected Radnor from the brassy glare of the West African sun, he had lolled upon this deck most of the time with his sun helmet covering his face.

Just then, with all the intensity of his twenty-four years, he was in the mood to damn the monotonous tropical sun almost as wholeheartedly as he damned the eternal mangroves; and the steady, splashing stab of paddle blades seemed to be the toneless whispering voice of monotony itself—monotony, that great god of the Nigerian mangrove swamps which Radnor had already learned to hate most of all.

"*Animo!*" he grunted mechanically at his paddleboys who, though not from the Kroo country, understood what he meant. "Edge! Make quick! *Animo!*"

And then as the paddle strokes speeded up for a minute or two, he grumbled to himself:

"This is a lousy way to make a living—driving these poor swine into a lather of sweat to get you somewhere you don't want to go. I'll wager that half the work that's done in this sub-

cellar o' hell is—"

The wail of a launch's siren broke sharply upon his philosophical observations, and he sat up as if he operated on springs. He had not heard or seen any evidence of another white man since noon of the previous day and he was not accustomed to that kind of isolation yet.

At Maridi, on one of the Barlow Company's mahogany concessions, which he hoped to reach before sundown and where he would officiate principally as a white influence and take care of the payroll, he knew he would be lucky if he saw another face of his own color once in three months. And that face most likely would belong to one of the Barlow Company's sphinx-like supervising agents, who would come snooping around periodically, looking for something to raise Cain about. Those fellows always had a bad liver.

So Radnor sat up and peered out under the grass awning, hoping that at least one of the white men aboard the launch was known to him; somebody who would bring her alongside his canoe and have a couple of drinks and say chin-chin.

Oagbi Creek, at that point, was too narrow for the launch's complement of white passengers to fail to see him; and even a district commissioner in the Nigerian government service would have been welcome to Radnor's liquor then. This, though 'most everybody he had left behind him at Dannatown knew that he had no earthly use for government men of any sort—not since the district commissioner at Dannatown had fined him half a month's pay for booting a colored government clerk of Sierra Leonese persuasion off the Barlow Company's trading beach there.

He surely did not like Sierra Leonese men; and he had a notion that he had been sent up to Maridi to be kept out of any further trouble of the sort.

But Ogabi Creek north of Goba was different from Dannatown; particularly when one was just twenty-four and was heading, all alone and for the first time, into the blackness of a Slave Coast night to reach the jungle solitude of Maridi. Consequently, Radnor's eyes were alight with a hungry hope as he looked up and saw the launch speeding toward him, hurling white fans of spray from her bows. His canoe edged closer to the mangroves, as the launch's siren screamed again and she came right on —a Nigerian government launch apparently.

The sun-helmeted heads of two or three government officials were visible aft of her little cabin skylight and, unless Radnor was mistaken, a houseboy was—yes, he was opening a new bottle and was preparing to serve drinks all around. Radnor leaned out a little farther. He did not want their liquor particularly; but it might be months before he would again have a chance to see and talk and drink with . . .

The sun helmets dipped out of sight one by one as the white men descended into the launch's cabin, and the houseboy, balancing bottles and glasses on a tray, followed them just as the knife-like bows sliced past Radnor's canoe.

A few scattering drops of the far-flung spray spattered Radnor's cheeks and the canoe rocked rather violently in the wash as the launch sped on. Radnor pulled his head back sharply, just as if he had been slapped across the face, and for a minute or so he looked steadily down at the churning water.

Even the grim set of his mouth—grim enough, to all appearances, to face the dread solitude of Maridi—did not camouflage the fact that he was quite hurt.

A SHARPER, deeper, newer sense of loneliness had suddenly come down upon him—a smothering sort of darkness that stifled, the kind of darkness that is truly the creation of the Niger Delta swamps and seems blackest sometimes when the pitiless equatorial sun is still

high above the mangroves. This sort of thinking was not good on Oagbi Creek. It would be still worse at Maridi. And the laugh that tried to scatter it into the discard was not much of a success.

"All—all right," he muttered to the fast disappearing launch, "if you're too high and mighty to stop and have a drink on me, I'll—damn you! I'll have one on— What in thunder is that?"

Radnor's right hand snatched swiftly at the water.

"Got it the first time! Well, well! And whose little doll are you?"

Even then the nearest of Radnor's paddleboys looked pained; as if some kind of acute distress had suddenly come, or was about to come, upon them. But Radnor, trying rather nervously and desperately to forget his fear of loneliness, was too busy examining his find to bother about the changing facial expressions of canoeboys.

The wash of the launch had flung the thing within his range of vision and within reach of his hand. Otherwise, very probably, he would not have seen it at all.

It was about five inches in length and about half as much as that around; a long faced, flat nosed, camwood-dyed little figure crudely carved out of a piece of mangrove stick and, with more or less artistic reservations, was intended to represent a man. Probably a chief.

To the uninitiated, it might readily have seemed to be a native doll, carved by some doting parent, in his own likeness, perhaps, for the amusement of an unusually favored daughter. But even Radnor knew enough to suspect that this was not really the case. He had never seen a native child with a doll of any sort—not around the palm-oil beaches of Dannatown, at any rate; and numberless children of all ages had accompanied their mothers to the kernel store and oil yard of Barlow's beach where Radnor, until two days before, had held forth for over a year. No, he was reasonably sure the little figure was not a child's doll.

The nearest of his eight canoeboys, fore and aft of the little deck on which he squatted, were obviously sure of it too. They were so sure of it and whispered so excitedly and volubly to their companions about it that before Radnor realized just what was happening to him, the canoe had come to a full stop in an even more sudden semi-darkness and he was quite alone.

A screen of overhanging mangroves shut out most of the light on the offshore side of the canoe; on the other, dimly discernible to Radnor, was a bush path that led into the very heart of the jungle. He would not have known it was a bush path if he had not seen four or five canoeboys trying to crowd themselves, all at once, through an opening in the mangrove blanket that was normally intended to accommodate one man at a time.

"What in hell—where—come back here, you swine! What kind of damn fool trick is this? Come back! Balli, Yedda, you ruddy fools! You can't run out on me like this!"

But the sweating, unpaid, staring-eyed paddleboys not only could run out on him—they did. And not one of them hesitated long enough even to cast a fleeting glance over his shoulder.

In half a minute Radnor was gaping at the entrance to the bush path and listening to the dimming patter of naked feet racing wildly off into a silence that grew more and more leaden with every passing second.

Slowly and dully mopping his face and neck, Radnor shivered a little; and presently his rather stupefied stare came back to the little effigy in his hand. And after a minute or so, with a doubtful but valiant smile struggling for expression in the corners of his mouth, he muttered:

"Hunh. Great little luck bringer you are. The minute you come aboard I lose my whole ruddy crew and get stuck—Lord knows where!"

SEVERAL hours later Radnor was still stuck. His canoeboys had not come back and, though he had managed to nose his way out from behind the screen of mangroves in the hope of getting some assistance from a passing canoe, no one had come to his rescue.

He knew it was useless to try to follow his paddleboys; and the occupants of such canoes as had answered his hail and come alongside had suddenly lost interest when they discovered that his crew had deserted him in a body. Or perhaps it was that when they caught a glimpse of the doll lying on one of Radnor's cushions they decided they had urgent business elsewhere—at a nearby native market, or at their father's house, or at a juju play—almost anywhere away from Radnor and his canoe.

Radnor was not sure of this. And when he began to wonder whether word had gone up and down Oagbi Creek that he was some sort of taboo, and several times was on the verge of tossing the little effigy overboard, he concluded that this was just superstitious drivel and that getting rid of the doll would not do him any good in any case; not if everybody on Oagbi Creek knew that he had had it. They would still go on thinking he had the thing even if he did throw it back into the water. However, he did try putting it out of sight under a pillow to see if this would help matters. But, so far, this subterfuge had not changed his luck in the least.

His canoe was too big for him to handle alone, even if he had known the way to Maridi or to any conveniently handy native village where he might have picked up a fresh crew of paddleboys. And since the winding maze of the Niger Delta creeks was still an unsolved mystery to quite a number of the oldest white traders and service men in the country, it was much more of a mystery to Radnor.

Consequently, because he was only too painfully aware of this salient fact, he hugged the shadow of the mangroves and stayed where he was. He did at least know that he was on Oagbi Creek. One government launch had passed that way; other launches—even small, low-draft freighters—were not an impossibility. And perhaps some chief or trader he had met at Dannatown might come along and help him out.

He had enough supplies, plenty of liquor, two hurricane lanterns and more than enough kerosene to last—well, he hoped he was not going to be food for the Oagbi Creek mosquitoes that long. Also, somewhere in the smaller of his two cabin trunks, there was a revolver: and though he did not expect to have to use the weapon, he thought it might be as well to get it out of the trunk and stick it into his hip pocket.

This attended to, he tried to forget about it; not because of what the gun signified, but because traders' assistants who made any sort of display of firearms, even in the middle of the jungle, were considered to be either show-offs, or very young, or both.

Four o'clock—"small-chop" time—passed by unheeded. He had no appetite somehow, and in spite of his incompleted threat to "have one on the house" when the government launch had gone by, drinking alone had only emphasized his loneliness, just as the thought of eating alone robbed him of his customarily healthy appetite for small-chop.

Every few minutes he stuck his head out from under the grass awning of the canoe, and his eyes roved hopefully up and down Oagbi Creek. There was a look in them now that shrank from the promise of disappointment, a look that watched the sun as if he were running a race with the sunset.

After dark Radnor laughed shortly, lighted another cigaret and assured himself it would not be so bad. Then, toward six o'clock, when no canoes of any sort had passed in some little time, he began to prepare his lanterns, with

one eye upon the saffron-red ball of the sun that was poised on the rim of the mangroves. And he was so intent upon this that the light splash of paddles, coming upon him from the South, almost crept alongside unawares. When he did look out, the prow of the oncoming canoe, which was much the same as his own in size and appearance, was only a few lengths away.

There was not much hope in Radnor's eyes when he caught sight of it, even though his expression did brighten up a bit. He looked rather dully at the canoeboys who sat forward of the grass awning, and wondered who the principal occupant might be. And then a kind of human sunburst thrust his head out beyond the awning, and Radnor's eyes widened sharply while his heart sank into his mosquito boots.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Radnor," a rather thick but very highly polished voice enunciated with meticulous care, though the speaker's expression did indicate some surprise. "This is indeed an unanticipated pleasure. I trust you are not in any embarrassing difficulty."

"Plenty," Radnor growled as the other canoe came to a full stop alongside his own, and he had a better opportunity to view the sartorial splendor of Gulliver Anthony Dorr.

This individual had been born of simple and well intentioned colored parents in Sierra Leone, who had made the mistake of sending him to the native college there to educate him for better things, with the result that Gulliver Anthony had concentrated principally upon the dictionary. So far as Radnor knew he was now a clerk of the administrative departments of the Nigerian government. And the last time Radnor had seen him had been when he had booted him off the Barlow Company's beach at Dannatown, and had been fined half a month's pay for doing it.

But Gulliver Anthony, whose coincidental presence on Oagbi Creek just then had a slight flavor of mystery, seemed willing to forget all about the episode, and apparently he hoped Radnor would forget about it too. Doubtless Radnor's boot had not been the first to acquaint him with the uncertain temper of trading beach assistants on hotter than usual afternoons.

"My canoeboys have skipped," Radnor said glumly, glancing at the dying sun and lighting one of his lanterns. "Where are you going? I didn't know there were any government offices up this way."

Gulliver Anthony smiled a glistening, ingratiating smile. He glittered and glowed all over. Arrayed in spotless white drill, he wore a flowing tie of lavender and orange stripes that made no pretence of matching a polka dot shirt, while about his waist was a cummerbund that was probably cerise in a better light. The hilt of a knife and the butt of a revolver stuck prominently out of the cummerbund; and on his crinkly head Gulliver Anthony sported a wide-brimmed panama that was turned up in front and down in the back. The ensemble, in a colored revue, would probably have been very successful. Just then, however, the scene was Oagbi Creek at sunset and Radnor was in no humor to see the joke.

"I am no longer in the service of his Britannic Majesty's government," Gulliver Anthony said, and his glistening smile broadened hopefully because he knew what Radnor thought of government clerks.

"No?" shortly. "What are you doing now?"

"*Pro tem?* I assume you mean merely *pro tem?*"

"Who are you working for and where are you going?"

Gulliver Anthony looked pained. He did not like to have his Latin treated so abruptly. But presently and somewhat diffidently he said—

"At the—er—precise moment I am adjourning to Maridi."

"Maridi! Like hell you are!"

But Gulliver Anthony merely smiled.

"You see, Mr. Radnor, I have a brother."

"Brother? Hunh. Isn't that wonderful? What of it?"

Still Gulliver Anthony smiled.

"My name, in the event that a slight mental aberration may have imposed forgetfulness, is Gulliver Anthony Dorr. Dorr. Perhaps—"

"Your brother? It isn't your brother that's—well, I'll be damned! The colored overseer who is supposed to be waiting for me at headquarters at Maridi to show me the ropes is named Dorr. Absalom Jonathan—"

"No," Gulliver Anthony hastened to interrupt. "Not Jonathan. Solomon. Absalom Solomon Dorr."

Radnor almost grinned.

"They tell me he's one of the best in the business. And he's your brother?"

"My eldest brother. The first born son."

Gulliver Anthony rolled his eyes like headlights devoutly to heaven a moment, then came back to earth again and continued:

"Absalom exhibited an adolescent idiosyncrasy to become quite adequately acquainted with the forest primeval. Er—that is—you have heard, no doubt, of the forest primeval?"

RADNOR grunted and scowled around him at the suddenly deepening shadows that, in another minute or so, would become black as pitch. He strongly suspected that Gulliver Anthony, having quite probably talked himself out of his job, was on his way to Maridi to sponge the price of his passage home to Sierra Leone from his successful and conscientious brother, Absalom; and Radnor was quick enough to suspect also that the ex-government clerk's presence on Oagbi Creek was not nearly so coincidental as it had at first appeared.

Doubtless, having learned that he, Radnor, was leaving for Maridi, Gulliver Anthony had made it his business to follow on his heels if only to be quite sure of finding brother Absalom at the Maridi concession headquarters when he reached the place. Evidently the luck was with Gulliver Anthony.

"How about getting me a new crew of paddleboys?" Radnor asked suddenly. "Or giving me a tow? Got a rope? I haven't any."

Neither had Gulliver Anthony, apparently. But he hastened to assure Mr. Radnor that if Mr. Radnor would only place adequate confidence in Gulliver Anthony Dorr, a crew of superperfect paddleboys would be forthcoming in no time at all. However, the bribe of a few bottles of gin to a village chief would probably be necessary, and if Mr. Radnor would provide the gin—

"Get going," Radnor instructed sharply. "I'll fork out the gin when I get the paddleboys. And snap into it! I don't want to hang around here all night."

The light of the dying sun and the resplendence of Gulliver Anthony faded simultaneously. But, though Radnor knew the light of the sun would return, he began, after awhile, to have grave doubts about the ex-government clerk.

At the end of the first hour of darkness and of waiting, with the Oagbi Creek mosquitoes playing an endless symphony about his ears, he wished he had borrowed half of Gulliver Anthony's canoeboys instead of sending the word-slinging fathead on a hunt for another crew.

The passing of the second hour found him damning himself soundly for his stupidity. And when his wristwatch told him in the flickering, smoky light of a hurricane lantern that the hour was almost 1:00 A. M, Radnor had another drink. He did not know how many drinks he had already had, but as he poured this one he assured himself audibly once more that he was not drinking alone or talking to himself because, of course, he had "Old Man Grove" for company.

The mangrove stick effigy, which he

had christened Old Man Grove in a doubtful flight of alcoholic inspiration, was now propped against a pillow. And Old Man Grove was a good listener, inasmuch as he tacitly agreed with everything Radnor had to say about the lousy jungle swamps of the Lower Niger and about such foul, unspeakable swine as Gulliver Anthony Dorr.

"If you're a juju," Radnor told Old Man Grove presently, "you're a ruddy solemn occasion."

Then, after a silent minute or so:

"Where were you heading for anyway when I hauled you out of the creek? And why did my paddleboys skip out the minute you came aboard? Do you belong in the water? Some kind of water juju, huh?" A pause while Radnor drained his glass. "You're a great help, you are. You lie around on a ruddy pillow and look as solemn as an owl and—" Radnor paused again and his chin jerked up a little. "What was that, old-timer?" he whispered. "Paddles? And a—a tomtom?"

His glance swung sharply in an upriver direction and he peered into the leaden blackness out of which the sound had come.

"And a bugle, by thunder! Who in Tophet's blowing a bugle on Oagbi Creek?"

The bugle's note was not very clear at first, and the tomtom's beat was slow and dirge-like; but the whispering voices of many paddles lifted higher and higher like the ghostly rustling of an all-enveloping shroud.

Just how near all this was Radnor was not sure; but it was too near for his peace of mind, since he had not the slightest idea what it was all about. He stuck his head out from under the canoe's grass awning and tried to detect a light somewhere in the blackness upriver. But there was no light. Just a plaintive bugle note, the solemnly measured beat of a solitary tomtom and the wraith-like swish of paddle blades that came nearer and nearer with a vague sort of solidity that flung a wall across Oagbi Creek.

Radnor could not see this wall. It was not near enough for that yet; and while he strained his eyes to see more clearly and thought, without anything more definite in mind just then, of the bush path his deserting canoeboys had taken, there struck suddenly upon his ears the beat of another tomtom and the whisper of more paddles—downstream.

Radnor's head jerked about in that direction, and he listened for the second bugle note. But there was none. Yet after a little while, both up and downstream, tomtom definitely answered tomtom, paddle stroke whispered eerily to paddle stroke, and he knew that another invisible wall had been flung across Oagbi Creek.

Mentally and physically Radnor hung a few moments in a state of suspended animation, his right hand poised hesitantly over his hip pocket. He had a decided sensation of being suddenly trapped between two forces that were creeping in upon him to the unpleasantly slow measure of a dead march; and almost at once, in those vaults of his memory in which he walked on tiptoe, a cathedral organ was giving voice to the low and most impressive thunders of the "Dead March" from "Saul."

Once, in his 'teens, Radnor had attended a military funeral, and the somber impression the cathedral service made upon him at the time had not been forgotten. And what struck him almost instantly and most queerly in his present situation was that his sensations and impressions were curiously the same. The one odd note that was at variance with all this was the note of the bugle. There was nothing particularly dirge-like about it, and it was not exactly a bugle call as Radnor understood bugle calls. It was just a single, long drawn out note that trailed rather plaintively off-key toward the end, possibly when the bugler's breath gave out.

But that it was a call of some sort Radnor had no doubt; and as his right hand dipped into his hip pocket and

closed upon the butt of his revolver, he bit nervously upon his lower lip and hoped he was not making a fool of himself.

IN THE pitch-black darkness, unrelieved by any light save his own hurricane lanterns, he was quick to realize that those lanterns made him a shining target for anything that happened to be headed his way. This was not a pleasant thought, because it immediately suggested hundreds of eyes staring at him from out of the dark just as if the smoky glimmer of his hurricane lanterns was a flaring spotlight that nailed him to the center of a stage. Yet he did not immediately blow out the lights.

"Hell, I'm not afraid!" he told Old Man Grove in a hoarse, dry whisper. "Nothing to be afraid of, anyway. All I need is another drink."

Deliberately he laid the revolver down and, conscious every second of the whispering paddles and of the dull, dead beat of the tomtoms, he deliberately poured himself another drink. Straight this time.

Then, just as he raised his glass and said, "Chin-chin, old-timer," the bugle note answered him; and at the moment when the rim of the glass touched his lips, his canoe began to rock suddenly and strangely so that the glass clicked against his teeth. And Old Man Grove rolled off his pillow to recline beside the bottle of scotch which had toppled over and now rested against Radnor's knee.

Radnor paused.

"Wh—who's rocking this ruddy boat?" he asked hoarsely and reached for the revolver. "Who's there?"

There was no answer. The bugle note had died away, the rocking of the canoe stopped and, for a minute or so, even the tomtoms were stilled. Only the ghost-like swish of paddle blades whispered nearer and nearer and louder and louder; and Radnor suddenly downed the drink he had poured in a rather desperate effort to relieve the dusty dryness of his mouth and throat.

"Ugh!" He grunted and grimaced because he was not accustomed to gulping his liquor straight like that. "That's awful!" Then when he had put down the glass and put Old Man Grove back upon his pillow, he picked up the revolver again and laughed a short, altogether mirthless laugh. "Spooks, old-timer! Spooks rocking the ruddy canoe! But don't let 'em get you rattled. Let 'em rock, damn 'em! Let 'em rock!"

This was just bravado, and Radnor knew it. He knew also that if he could work the canoe back to the spot where his deserting canoeboys had found a bush path, he would do just as they had done and without any apologies or excuses to any one.

Heaven only knew where that bush path led to; and even if he did find it he might readily get himself into a worse fix than he was in at present. But this business of being caught in a trap with those ruddy paddles and tomtoms coming so slowly and deliberately nearer and nearer—he hated that.

And all those eyes watching him out of the dark—seeing him take a drink perhaps to bolster up his courage; watching him fidget and squirm while he tried to fool them into thinking he wasn't scared stiff! Radnor shivered, gripped the revolver a little tighter, pulled one of the hurricane lanterns toward him and blew out the light.

Almost instantly, and much nearer than he had supposed, the invisible bugler gave voice to that single, long drawn note, and once more and still more violently than before, Radnor's canoe rocked and Old Man Grove again rolled off his pillow. The little effigy would probably have rolled overboard if Radnor, squatting on the canoe's deck, had not thrust out his foot and stopped it.

"Who's there?" he demanded again thickly and peered fore and aft of the

canoe in search of a possible swimmer who might be trying to clamber aboard.

But if there were any dusky hands gripping the gunwale of the canoe, it was too dark to see them; though Radnor's eyes certainly strained hard enough. For, mysterious and ghost-like as the whole affair undoubtedly was, he had no real belief in the spooks he had tried to joke about.

"No, sir!" he muttered to himself. "No spooks! Some ruddy swine is rocking this canoe and—and—"

Radnor's voice trailed and died.

Out of the blackness upriver there loomed within range of his staring eyes the figure of a man. The bugler. A bugler such as Radnor had never dreamed of. In those first few seconds he had to assume that the figure was that of a man, because it seemed to be a combination of man, beast and bird—a furred and feathered creature that stood erect in the prow of a dugout and raised a bugle-like instrument to its lips as if to blow another note upon it.

MYSTERY stories? Here's a thriller. What would YOU do if you were benighted all alone in a weird and deserted mining town, discovered among the ruins a room paved with silver dollars, and realized that this incredible treasure had an even more incredible guardian—a man who had actually been hanged years before? That was the experience of the young geologist in Allan Vaughan Elston's fascinating story, "Ghost Town," in the next issue.

However, the bugle call did not at once materialize and, while Radnor gaped at the weird apparition, the dugout, propelled by but vaguely determined paddleboys, drew a little nearer, and yet a little nearer still.

No other canoes accompanied it. Up and downriver, the rushing whisper of many paddles was stilled. But Radnor knew the masses of canoes were there because the tomtoms still spoke to him with that same dirge-like beat that reminded him so much of a funeral, and at the same time informed him that he was trapped.

The figure in the prow of the dugout stood out more and more clearly—clearly enough at least for Radnor to see that the man was some sort of witch-doctor whose body was decorated, rather than clothed, with tufts of fur and feathers and with broad, winding stripes of white chalk that also streaked his face and throat.

Dangling geegaws of brass and ivory and the teeth and claws of animals hung about his neck and wrists; but upon his head, in contrast to all this barbarism, was a simple crown of leaves, or thatch, shaped something like a rather flat, inverted calabash.

Radnor stared transfixed at this embodiment of the thousand and one superstitions that stalked through the grubby mud-and-wattle villages of the somber Niger Delta swamp; stared and held his breath, not even wondering in that gasping second, just what part he, himself, was scheduled to play in the performance that, he felt sure, was going to center definitely upon him.

PERHAPS it was the total absence of voices that awed him most. The Niger Delta native, as a rule, could be depended upon to make plenty of noise with his vocal organs. Silence *en masse* was certainly not his forte.

Then Radnor's glance traveled be-

yond the grotesque figure of the witch-doctor, deeper into the dugout, which was just a trade canoe of the kind that was intended to accommodate three one-hundred-and-eighty-gallon puncheons of palm oil. But it was not carrying puncheons of palm oil now. Instead it carried something like a long box; a box that, dim as its outlines were, looked unpleasantly like—yes, like a home-made coffin!

An icy chill raced down Radnor's spine and he reached absently for a handkerchief to mop his forehead. His grip upon his revolver was a clammy one; and when he tried to cry out to the witch-doctor, tried to ask quite normally and naturally what it was all about, only a thick, inarticulate guttural broke from his dry lips.

He reached for the bottle of scotch; but as he did this the bugle note sounded again. Instantly Radnor's canoe rocked once more, this time like a one-woman shell in the wake of a mail steamer at Forcados.

"Hell!" Radnor exploded hoarsely, preserving his balance only by sheer luck. "What kind of ruddy game is this?"

His excited glance immediately traveled fore and aft to search anew for invisible swimmers who might be responsible for his discomfort. And while he was peering forward, a dripping, black, snake-like arm slipped over the gunwale of the canoe just where Old Man Grove rested against Radnor's very uncertain foot.

It was a lightning-like thrust and apparently as blind as it was eager and daring; and if its objective happened to be the little effigy, it missed this and, for a brief second or two, wet and anxious black fingers gripped Radnor's ankle. Radnor's breath caught sharply in a stifled cry. He jerked his leg upward and flung his body out of reach of those clutching fingers. And Old Man Grove, with nothing to lean against, rolled leisurely overboard and bobbed idly away just as Radnor, damning the witch-doctor and all his hosts, fired at the spot where the hand had been.

Radnor did not see Old Man Grove depart; but as he waited in a cold sweat for the crackling challenge of the shot to bring some sort of answer, he discovered that the little effigy was no longer in sight on the deck of the canoe.

Then, as he realized that the beat of the tomtoms had not changed in the least and that the fantastic, but motionlessly erect, figure of the bugler remained as erect and motionless as ever, he thought he saw yet another black and snake-like hand snatch at something or other that floated upon the turbulent face of Oagbi Creek just a few feet from his canoe.

"Damn them! I'll bet that's Old Man Grove!"

But the hand—if it had been a hand—vanished before he had a chance to risk another shot at it. And as he knew definitely now that there was nothing spooky about the rocking of his canoe after each bugle call, and that there were henchmen of the witch-doctor in the water around him, he had to keep watch in more directions than one to be ready for any sudden rush that might be made upon him.

But, with a very uncertain finger on the trigger and becoming more nervous every second as he tried the impossible trick of looking four ways at once, he suddenly had an inspiration. He would concentrate on the bugler. The bugler was responsible for all this. He was running this show. And no ruddy caricature in fur and feathers, blowing a lousy bugle, was going to capsize him and get away with it. He would shoot him off his silly perch and let him try blowing his bugle in whatever kind of Hades was reserved for witch-doctors.

"Confound his chalked-up hide! Didn't he hear me shoot? Doesn't he know I can get him no matter who gets me!" Radnor scowled at the witch-doctor. "If you blow that damned bugle again, so help me, Hannah, I'll let—you—have—it!"

Radnor's voice hesitated and wavered toward the end, because he thought he saw a slimy, wet black body reach up out of the water and over the prow of the dugout and slip something or other into the witch-doctor's hand. A second later this shiny wet black thing had slithered back into the water and had vanished with such speed and silence that Radnor gasped.

The thought that half a dozen or more of those human water-snakes were all around his canoe seemed to call for a new grip on courage of some sort.

He was sure he alone had observed the little by-play between the witch-doctor and the swimmer; in fact, it had happened so swiftly and so much under cover of the dark that, a few seconds afterward, Radnor could not have sworn that he, himself, had seen it. And the masses of canoes up and downriver were too far away to have spotted anything so uncannily vague as that bit of action.

Radnor picked up the bottle of scotch by the neck like a club, but he did not pour himself another drink because the witch-doctor was raising the bugle to his lips again.

"You ruddy fool!" Radnor shouted. "Don't you know I can shoot you full of holes!"

If the bugler heard him he paid no attention. Solemnly and deliberately he placed the bugle to his lips and seemed to brace himself for an unusually long and impressive effort. And in that silent second or two of suspense, Radnor achieved the halting thought that no matter what kind of superstitious flub-dub the witch-doctor stood for, he certainly had guts.

"He knows I have a gun and he doesn't give a damn!" Radnor told himself, as he, too, braced himself against the danger of being suddenly rocked into the creek. For he was sure they were going to try to turn him over this time and, once in the water, at the mercy of those black human snakes—

"Stop!" Radnor shouted quite involuntarily, and wondered if the cracked baritone he heard was his own. "If you blow that damned thing again—"

A longer, shriller blast upon the bugle drowned Radnor's voice with strident defiance; and Radnor, fully expecting his canoe to capsize any second—and desperately keeping faith with himself—flung an angrily excited shot at the witch-doctor.

The sudden, sharp crackling sound of it drowned out the bugle note; but drowned it out only for a thunderous instant. Almost at once the bugle note was lifting to a wilder and still more defiant scream—a primitive, barbaric cry that had probably sounded through the black of an ageless night and had defied many more fearful devils than the leaden bullets in white men's guns.

And while Radnor gaped as at a phenomenon, and wondered vaguely how it would feel to know you had actually killed a man—particularly a man with that kind of sand—he knew one good reason why he had missed the bugler.

For it was not his canoe that rocked this time.

It was the witch-doctor's dugout!

THE dugout was rocking from stern to stem as if a hundred spirits of evil had taken possession of it. Twice Radnor was sure it was going over altogether. But the furred and feathered bugler, balancing himself with the sure poise of an expert, kept his feet and blew blast after blast upon the bugle as if he were defying all the lackeys of the devil himself to do their worst.

Then suddenly, and while the dugout still rocked crazily, the witch-doctor raised his left hand high above his head. There was something held in this hand—something dimly short and stubby—something Radnor could not have defined at all if he had not had an intimate acquaintance with the thing, and had not seen the almost invisible swimmer slither over the prow of the dugout and place it in the witch-doc-

tor's left hand.

Old Man Grove!

Radnor had no doubt of it. And when the bugler had blown another fierce blast, he turned carefully about, with the dugout still rocking as dangerously as ever, faced the long, coffin-like box that had been behind him, suddenly dropped to his haunches and held his left hand straight out before him immediately over the box. Then, slowly, and as if with no little effort, as though all the forces of evil were trying to prevent it, he lowered Old Man Grove into the coffin.

After this, for perhaps the longest minute Radnor ever knew, there fell a silence that was deep as the dank and heavy silence of the tomb. The dugout no longer rocked. The bugle note had died away. The dirge-like beat of the tomtoms had stopped with a suddenness that made Radnor catch his breath.

Then the witch-doctor slowly began to straighten, the bugle once more to his lips; and, as he straightened, he blew a long, thin, rising note—actually as if he were dragging the sound of that whimpering cry right out of the coffin—perhaps out of the deeps of the spirit of Old Man Grove—and were flinging it from him into the shivering wastes of space.

The dugout rocked just a little, then a little more, until the witch-doctor was standing fully erect again, his face flung to the black roof of the night, the bugle note trailing off into an almost human sob of travail.

He did not turn toward Radnor. It was as if he had figuratively as well as literally turned his back on him because he had no further use for him. And as he suddenly lowered the bugle from his lips and spread both arms wide in an unmistakable climactic gesture, the beat of the tomtoms sounded again, a slowly quickening beat that rolled upward to a rumbling, deafening thunder.

This time, too, there was added the sound of voices—hundreds of them—both up and downriver, chanting the weirdest, wildest requiem that Radnor had ever heard or was likely to hear again; voices that began as thick, harsh guttural bassos, to rise octave by octave to a shrill screech of fury or triumph.

And with this, bringing the tomtoms nearer and nearer, came the splashing rush of paddles, a rumbling avalanche of sound that bore down upon the dugout and upon Radnor, and turned the blackness of Oagbi Creek into one of the nethermost pits of hell.

Without knowing it, Radnor had relinquished his grip on the bottle of scotch, even though his mouth and throat were dryer than ever. But he knew it was not liquor he needed now. What he needed most was to get away from there, and without any loss of time, before that horde of juju-crazy fanatics came down upon him and crucified him or something for taking a shot at their high priest.

Maybe he could find the bush path his canoeboys had taken. It was not so very far away—just a few yards downriver behind a screen of mangroves—and he was sure he would rather take a chance and swim for it than wait for heaven knew how many lunatics to make mincemeat out of him.

Radnor was stumbling aft of his canoe, over cases of supplies and cabin trunks, looking for some sign of the black swimmers, when from a downriver direction he saw the vague gray-black ghosts of canoes rushing down upon him out of the dark, filled with pandemonium. And he knew, without looking, that the same thing was happening upriver. If he could find that bush path—

Another hurried glance downriver, and Radnor was slipping from the tail of his canoe into the water. Hugging the mangroves, he struck out in the direction of the screened bush path, expecting any second to feel the clutching hands of at least half a dozen of the human water-snakes take hold of him and pull him under.

But he had hardly taken three strokes

when into the shrieking bedlam of Oagbi Creek there was injected a new and altogether unexpected note.

Two of them, in fact. The wail of a launch's siren and the sound of several shots fired in rapid succession.

The launch spoke from downriver; the shots came from the opposite direction; and the screaming voices in the ghost-like canoes quickly muttered off into a wailing silence to listen. The rushing paddles also paused, downriver and up.

And so did Radnor. He turned and went back to hang on to the tail of his canoe, waiting for that siren to sound again. It was the siren that interested him. The shots not so much, because they might have been of native origin. But the siren was white, possibly the siren of the same government launch he had seen go down just before he had picked up Old Man Grove.

Well, they'd have to stop this time. The creek was so jammed with canoes they would have to crawl through if they got through at all; and Radnor did not think the witch-doctor and his mob of fanatics would try to stop a government launch. It was one thing to pick on him when he was all alone like that; but stopping a government launch was an invitation to Yoruba soldiermen to pay them a visit with machine guns.

The siren screamed again—nearer this time—and the gray ghosts of canoes downriver seemed suddenly to thin out before Radnor's eyes and rustle whisperingly off the face of Oagbi Creek.

He raised himself high enough to look over the tail of his own canoe, peering at the place where the dugout had been, then raised himself still higher to be quite sure the darkness was not playing tricks upon his eyesight.

The dugout had gone.

Or perhaps it was just that the furred and feathered, chalked-up witch-doctor was lying low. Or maybe he, Radnor, was a little too far away. Half a canoe's length made a lot of difference in that kind of dark.

Radnor clambered over the tail of his canoe just as the siren screamed once more, much nearer than he expected. She must be going like the very devil to come up on him like that, and if she were not using her searchlight, which was not unlikely, she would never see him if he didn't get hold of one of his lanterns and start waving the thing. He shot a glance downriver and glimpsed the lights of the oncoming launch as her siren shrieked yet another warning.

"Hell! She'll be here in a brace of shakes! I'll never reach that ruddy lantern if I don't get a move on!"

He wheeled sharply forward toward the canoe's little deck and toward the smoky lantern that still burned there; wheeled just a little too sharply, stubbed his toe against a small case of supplies and flung forward upon his face. Something hard and flat came out of the dark and met him head on. For a split second pinwheels of light whirled before his eyes and then went suddenly out.

The launch's siren screamed again, and Radnor's canoe rocked in her wash as she raced by.

WHEN Radnor came to himself there was a pillow under his throbbing head. He was clothed in pajamas and he was lying on a bench-like seat in the cabin of a well appointed launch, and the moth-clouded light of a cabin lamp was in his eyes.

There was a thick, damp bandage about his head and the clean odor of witch-hazel struck his nostrills. Presently he knew he was alone in the cabin. But in a little while the reassuring drone of voices, somewhere on deck, came down to him through the open cabin skylight. Radnor smiled and closed his eyes. He could not hear what the voices said, but he knew there was more than one white man around somewhere and this meant that everything was all right.

When he opened his eyes again with something of a start, a tall, lean and

rather pale-faced white man was bending over him adjusting the soppy bandage about his head. There was a bottle of witch-hazel in this man's left hand.

"When—when did you come in?" Radnor asked in some surprise.

"Oh, hello, youngster," the man greeted him, and straightened. "Decided to come round at last, have you?"

"I hope so," Radnor said with a faint grin. "I heard voices on deck a little while ago, but I must have dozed off or something. How did I get here?"

The man put the bottle of witch-hazel down on the little cabin table, produced a cigaret case, lighted up and sat down on a camp chair beside his patient.

"You're here," he said, "because a colored fellow named Dorr, who says he used to be in the government service, made loud noises with a service revolver that doesn't belong to him and for which, I'm afraid, he carries no license." A slight grin of assurance accompanied this. "When I stopped to find out who owned a gun like that on Oagbi Creek, this chap Dorr invited me to go back and get you. He's up on deck now trying to make up his mind where he got that gun." Another and slightly broader grin. "My name's Stanhope, if you're interested."

"Stanhope!" Radnor's exclamation was flattering. "I've heard a lot about you. You're from government headquarters? At Warri? It was you who snuffed out the Kwali rebellion, wasn't it?"

"Thanks for knowing me," Stanhope said dryly. "I like to think my fame is spreading. Dorr tells me you are heading for Maridi?"

"Yes, sir," Radnor said, and did not realize how respectful he had become to a government man.

"Damned shame," Stanhope grunted. "You're too young. Those trading firms shouldn't be allowed to send youngsters like you—"

"Oh, I don't know," Radnor hastened to interrupt. "I—I'm not afraid."

Stanhope looked very steadily into Radnor's eyes a moment or two.

"No? That's fine." A pause. "I suppose you feel a bit foggy. But you're quite intact—just a sizable lump on your left temple. Perhaps a little brandy—"

"No, thanks. I have a big enough head now." Radnor smiled ruefully. "That juju palaver was the best excuse I'll ever have for getting spificated."

Stanhope laughed, regarded Radnor with an admiring twinkle in his penetrating gray eyes, then ground his cigaret end in an ash receiver.

"Feel well enough to tell me about it?" he asked, and seemed more than just a little eager to hear Radnor's story. "Dorr tells me you have just been relieved of a number of devils."

"Did he tell you why he didn't come back with the canoeboys I sent him for?"

"Yes," Stanhope said. "He told me about that. And if what he says is true, I think you've had a great stroke of luck. I've been trying to get a ringside seat to one of those things for years, and you had the colossal luck to get right inside the ropes. How on earth did you manage to get hold of Chief Daka's effigy?"

"Daka? Effigy? You mean Old Man—you mean that—that thing I picked out of the water?"

"Yes. The effigy of Chief Daka of Oagbitown who was murdered over a year ago. You say you just picked it out of the water?"

Radnor nodded; and prompted by Stanhope, who seemed to know a great deal about all sorts of juju palaver, he told a rather shamefaced story of just what had happened to him from the moment he had picked up the little effigy until he had tripped over a case of supplies and cracked his head against a trunk or one of the larger provision cases.

Stanhope listened very attentively, like a man who was making mental

notes of Radnor's recital, and finally he said with a slight smile:

"I wondered why you were wet enough to have taken a bath in the creek with your clothes on. And I wouldn't be so apologetic about the affair if I were you. I'll wager if I had seen, through your eyes, what you have seen tonight, I'd have taken a chance on swimming for it long before you did. Would you like something to drink now? Might brace you up a bit."

"No. No, thanks." A pause. "But I'd surely like to know what that crazy juju palaver was all about. What did Gulliver Anthony have to say about it?"

"Dorr, you mean?" Stanhope smiled slightly. "He's an interesting duck. When he discovered at Oagbitown, where he went looking for canoeboys for you, that you were possessed of devils, he carefully refrained from returning to tell you about it, although he professes a very wordy contempt for all such pagan superstitions.

"But, on the other hand, he wasn't afraid to try to help you out by taking the risk of betraying the fact that he is carrying a service revolver to which he has no right or title whatever. And he knows as well as I do that he could spend some time on a chain gang for that sort of thing. We don't like those fellows swiping our guns."

Radnor's eyes widened slightly, and Stanhope's smile, this time, did not seem so assuring.

"He says," Stanhope added, "that he's going up to Maridi to work for his brother, who is the chief overseer for your company up there, and that that is why he happened to be with you. Is that true?"

"Er—yes," Radnor said and felt as if he were walking on eggs. "His brother is the chief overseer at Maridi. And—er—Gulliver Anthony's all right. If—that is—if he just has to have a license to keep that gun, I'll buy him one." Radnor's expression just then would have startled no one more than it would have startled Radnor himself, had he been able to see it. "How's that?"

"That's fine," Stanhope said, and the corners of his mouth twitched slightly. "But this doesn't happen to be my district, so it's really none of my business." He laughed. "I just thought I'd get more generous details out of him if I enlarged upon the dire penalties of the law in such cases. You see, Radnor, those fellows, though they do get their religion out of a Bible that's even been printed in pidgin English for their special benefit, and though they act as interpreters for us and all that sort of thing—they rarely tell us the truth about anything unless we club it out of them. Particularly the truth about juju palaver."

Radnor's anxious look gave way to a smile.

"What did you get out of Gulliver Anthony?"

And Stanhope told him. . . .

NORMALLY a native chief, when he died, was buried in the innermost room of his own house. But, according to custom among many native peoples of the Niger Delta, murdered men and suicides, being considered to have become possessed of evil spirits, were buried "out".

This meant buried in the bush—anywhere—just so long as the place was isolated. And Chief Daka of Oagbitown had been no exception. As he had been killed with many knives, his spirit had been exiled from the everyday haunts of men. This spiritual ostracism lasted in every case for one year. At the end of that time it was customary for the witch-doctor of the village to prepare a coffin and make an effigy of the murdered man.

He placed the coffin in a dugout and the effigy in the coffin and, accompanied by the deceased's relatives and friends, who were privileged to watch the subsequent proceedings from a respectful distance, he journeyed as near to the

grave of the outcast as the dugout would take him.

Then, blowing upon a bugle that was supposed to have supernatural powers, the witch-doctor "recalled" the assumedly purged spirit of the dead man from its isolation and invited it to enter into the effigy. And as evidence that the business of dealing with spirits was a dangerous one, the dugout always rocked more or less violently, according to the power of the spirit involved.

However, when the ceremony was completed to the witch-doctor's satisfaction, the effigy was then buried "in" —that is, within the sacred precincts of temporal and spiritual respectability. This ceremony, which Stanhope seemed to have known about for years, was refered to as the Recall—and so far as he had ever been able to gather, it had always come off in much the same way.

Except in the case of Chief Daka of Oagbitown.

When the Oagbitown witch-doctor, several weeks before, had first tried to recall the spirit of Chief Daka, the dugout containing the coffin had rocked so violently that it had capsized, and the little effigy of Chief Daka, dropping out of the open coffin, had floated away in the dark and had vanished for awhile.

Evidently the evil spirits that had murdered the chief of Oagbitown had been of a particularly virulent sort and had taken possession of his effigy to the exclusion of all good spirits; because, of course, this alone could explain to the native mind the capsizing of a witch-doctor's dugout when the Recall was sounded.

Thus, Chief Daka's effigy had haunted the creeks around Oagbitown for long enough to make its presence known and dreaded for miles around. No native had wanted to touch it with as much as a paddle blade.

Consequently, when Radnor's canoeboys had seen him pick it up and take it aboard the canoe, their very sudden departure was not difficult to understand. Then, when the news of Radnor's find had spread, it had become the solemn duty of the Oagbitown witch-doctor—in full view of the customary spectators—to recall the effigy, as well as the violent spirits that possessed it, from a white man's canoe and transfer them to the coffin in the dugout!

And the only persuasion the witch-doctor was permitted to use for the performance of this ticklish feat was the persuasion of a bugle note.

Stanhope laughed and added:

"That witch-doctor probably was more afraid of you than you were of him. He had to rock your canoe for appearance's sake and give it a darn good rocking, too, to make his work convincing. And I'll wager he expected any minute to be potted for doing it. He must have had a lot of courage to go through with it."

Radnor nodded rather glumly.

"I thought that myself after I'd taken a shot at him. But why didn't he just come to me a couple of hours ahead of time and ask me for the darned effigy? I'd have let him have it."

Stanhope's laughter this time was unrestrained.

"That witch-doctor was a brave man, Radnor, but he wasn't Samson enough to wrap his arms about the pillars of his pagan temple and bring it down about his ears. And that's just about what he would have done if he'd come and simply asked you to hand over Chief Daka's effigy. Witch-doctors don't do things that way. Their life and livelihood depend on their doing things their way and, in this case, not even violence was permitted. The thing had to be done according to Hoyle. With nothing but a sort of bugle!" Stanhope smiled. "And perhaps a little hypnotism."

"Hypnotism?"

"Yes. I imagine those human snakes you speak of—the fellows who rocked your canoe—were more or less under hypnotic influence. In various lines of endeavor witch-doctors find hypnotism

very useful. It avoids letting the necessary puppets know how you pull the strings." Stanhope rose. "I think we must be pretty close to the parting of our ways. How do you feel now?"

"I'm all right, thanks. Sure." Radnor swung his legs off the bench and sat up. The cabin swam a moment or two, then steadied a bit. "My canoe tagging on behind?"

"Yours and Dorr's. Also your canoeboys. I have to hustle on upriver to Bukoni or I'd detour round to Maridi with you."

"Couldn't think of it," Radnor assured him, and came shakily to his feet. "St—steady does it. Sure. I'm all right. You just say when and I'll be ready."

And not many minutes later, with the vague shadow of a khaki-clad Yoruba orderly hovering in the background, he stood with Stanhope beside the launch's rail looking down into his canoe. There was a rather troublesome blur in his eyes, and when he shook his head to clear them, it hurt not a little.

GULLIVER ANTHONY had already gone overside and was squatting on the little deck of Radnor's canoe.

"Sure you're quite all right?" Stanhope asked Radnor again.

"Sure, quite." Radnor's head came up sharply. "Chin-chin, sir. And thanks a lot."

"Chin-chin, youngster. And the best of luck."

"Thanks. I won't forget to use the witch-hazel."

There was no handshake. Radnor went over the rail, reached the deck of his canoe, found another pillow under his head, heard the dim putter of the launch as she slipped away and vaguely saw her lights hanging like earrings from Gulliver Anthony's ears, just a second or two before another swimming darkness fell.

And then, absurdly enough, the slanting rays of the morning sun were in his eyes. But somehow, when he had had a minute or two to think about it, Radnor did not mind this. He liked the sun this morning. And the eternal mangroves drifting by—they seemed to have become much brighter overnight. Green stuff with the sun on it. Fine. That was life. And those ruddy mangroves never died.

His glance shifted and he beheld Gulliver Anthony, oblivious of everything, carefully preparing a whisky and soda for himself. Evidently Gulliver Anthony thought he knew how. His manner was reminiscent of the Dannatown government beach mess and his every motion was an imitation.

But Radnor smiled. Gulliver Anthony was all right. He would probably steal anything that wasn't nailed down and he was a ruddy comic dictionary on the loose, but there was no sense in getting ratty about it. Not for keeps. Just boot him and forget it. And he would come back for more and help you out when you needed him.

Radnor looked the other way and let Gulliver Anthony have his drink.

Stock-Raising HOMESTEADS

By CARL ELMO FREEMAN

FREE homes to be had for the taking, new worlds to conquer, new empires to build, right here in our own great West! There are over two hundred million acres of free land in the States west of the Mississippi, except Iowa and Texas. There is also Government land subject to homestead in the States of Michigan, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. And Alaska has three and a half million acres more to pick from if you have a pair of fur-lined pajamas in your old pack-sack. All the Government land in Iowa has been taken. And Texas never had any, because she reserved her lands to the State when she entered the Union.

Any of this Government land may be homesteaded by any American, male or female, twenty-one years of age or over, by meeting the requirements of the homestead laws.

For a long time a qualified person could take up only 160 acres. Then, as the more fertile lands were homesteaded and only the arid and semi-arid lands were left, another law was passed, called the Enlarged Homestead Act, which raised the limit to 320 acres, or half a section.

Under this law the public domain was further culled and selected for locations that could be cropped under the dry-land system of farming. In a few years filings began to drop off and there still remained large areas of considerable value for grazing. Then, December 29, 1916, another law was passed increasing the area that could be homesteaded to 640 acres, or one full section. This is called the Stock-Raising Homestead Act, and covers land chiefly suitable for grazing and raising forage crops.

The filing fee is $5.00 if the entry is less than 81 acres, and $10.00 if it is more. And in addition, the entryman must pay a commission of $1.50 for each 40-acre tract entered, or $24.00 for a full section. Entry may be made before a U. S. Land Commissioner, or a county clerk, at an additional cost of $3.00, thus making a total of $37.00 filing fees on 640 acres. Final proof may be made at the expiration of three years and not later than five years.

Under the old laws a portion of the area homesteaded had to be cultivated. Under the Stock-Raising Homestead law, in lieu of cultivation the entryman is required to make permanent improvements upon the land entered, of a nature to increase its value for stock-raising purposes at least $1.25 per acre, or $800.00 per section of 640 acres.

A large part of the cost of these improvements is absorbed in labor which may be performed by the homesteader himself. As an example: A mile of three-wire fence is valued by the inspectors from the Land Office at $150.00, and a mile of four-wire fence at $200.00. One strand of barbed wire a mile long, or four 80-rod spools, costs at the railroad towns in the West, about $12.50 or less. So, if the posts can be cut on the ground and set in the fence-line by the homesteader himself, the cash outlay will not be more than $40.00 for the wire and staples in a mile of three-wire fence.

Developing subsurface water is very

expensive on most of these homesteads, as the underground water is usually at considerable depth. Well drillers want from $1.50 to $2.00 per foot for the first hundred feet, and fifty cents per foot added for each additional hundred feet. This includes setting the necessary casing, and the pump pipe and pump in place and testing the well for flow with his rig. Windmill $70.00, and materials to build the tower cost about $30.00. The actual cash outlay for the average 150-foot well with windmill equipment will be about $400.00. A dirt storage tank is usually added so that there may be a reserve supply of water on hand for the stock at all times.

Because of the cost of wells, dirt tanks are used by most of the settlers to catch and retain rainwater. These are constructed by merely placing an earth dam across a canyon or wash down which flood waters escape following rains.

These dirt tanks may be very pretentious affairs with a dam containing a concrete, or a rock filled cedar-crib, core and a deep excavation above that will hold water the year round. In any case the construction cost is practically all home labor with some cash outlay for horse feed and a blacksmith bill for sharpening plow and scraper blades. If a pipe is laid in the dam to carry water for the stock to a trough below, and the reservoir fenced, the water may be used for domestic purposes.

But many homesteaders are hauling water several miles for house use. It is surprising how well an average family may be maintained upon ten gallons of water a day for all domestic purposes.

Dwellings are not considered as necessary improvements on stock-raising homesteads, in spite of the fact that residence on the land is necessary.

A box house ten feet by twelve feet in size, with a door and one window is considered by the land office as a habitable dwelling. If built of lumber with corrugated iron roof and a rough board floor, the material, including nails, hardware, window sash, door, etc, will cost from $30.00 to $40.00, depending upon local conditions. If it is possible to buy native lumber from a local sawmill, material for a shack with two rooms of this size may be bought for that money.

Log cabins are much more practical than the thin box affairs. And, if the land carries timber tall enough, and the house is roofed with clapboards, or split shingles, has a hard-packed earth floor and a rock chimney, the necessary outlay for a log cabin is very small indeed. If the location is on or adjacent to a National Forest, the house logs may be secured without cost from the Forest Ranger on a "free use" permit.

In the Southwest adobe houses are very practical and the most comfortable of any house that can be built. In building an adobe house the cash outlay can be almost what you care to make it. With a dirt floor and dirt roof, the door, door frame, window sash and window frame, hinges, lock and a few nails will be all that requires cash.

Adobe bricks are made ten inches wide, sixteen inches long and four inches thick. Adobe walls may be made ten or sixteen inches thick without the use of rock or concrete foundation.

When the house is finished it may be plastered inside with the same mud thinned, to which some sand has been added to make it spread easier. This mud plaster, when dry, will take whitewash and calcimine. The hole from which the adobe and mud plaster were taken can be shaped up and used as a cellar.

Then there is the "picket" house, a combination of logs and adobe. The scrubby timber usually found on the open range in the Southwest readily lends itself to this type of house construction, universal among the Mexican inhabitants.

Cedar or piñon pickets are set in a trench forming a square of the size decided upon for the house. An opening is left for the door. The tops are cut

off even, trimmed wedge shape to fit in a groove cut in the under side of a transverse log laid on them to support the roof beams. Across the roof beams are laid small poles which are chinked with grass and mud to hold the dirt roof.

To the pickets forming the walls are tacked small wattles or withes running crosswise to act as laths to hold the mud plaster, inside and out. A hole is cut for the window and a flue installed if desired.

Adobe or picket houses can not be surpassed for comfort in the Southwest. This is being written in an adobe house. It does not shake, weave, tremble, sigh, whistle, or moan in the wind. There is a four-inch dirt roof to insulate against heat and cold and over all is a galvanized metal roof guttered to catch rain water which is piped into a cool underground cistern.

Residence must be established on the homestead within six months after date of filing. In case of sickness or other unavoidable cause, another six months' time may be allowed. Then, after residence has been established, a leave of absence for five months of each year may be granted.

Ex-Service men receive credit for their time in the Army or Navy. But they must show seven months' residence on the land and comply with the other requirements.

An entryman and entrywoman may marry one year after each has filed on a homestead and then prove up on both homesteads. If a widow, or a widower, dies leaving minor children, the children may receive title immediately and, if desired, the land may be sold by the administrator or guardian for the benefit of the heirs.

If the homesteader goes crazy trying to figure out how to trap the coyote that stole the only hen that was laying, residence, cultivation and so forth are not required during the period of insanity. However, if sanity is recovered before expiration of three years following date of entry, he or she must reestablish residence and comply with the law.

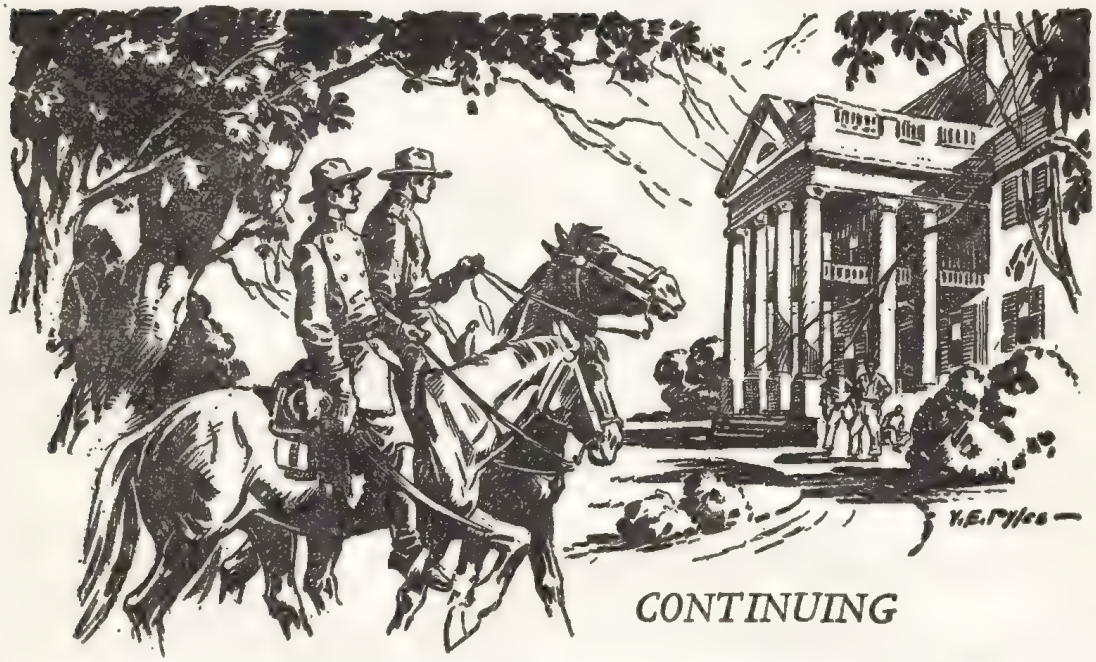
In Utah there are some two million acres of land on which there is not suitable water for domestic use. So the law provides that, instead of the entryman's living upon the land, he may live at such a distance as will enable him successfully to farm the land.

Occasionally a small area of public land is found segregated in a settlement, or surrounded by patented lands. This may be filed upon, and "additional" land taken to make up the full section of 640 acres selected from other unoccupied public lands within a radius of twenty miles of it. Residence may be established upon the small tract and it will apply upon the whole.

I am personally familiar with instances where fractional parts as low as five, seven and eleven acres, lying close to schools and in settlements, were overlooked. These were discovered, filed on, and the "additional" taken twelve to eighteen miles out. Final proof was made in each instance and patents granted.

But such opportunities are exceptional and rare indeed. Seekers for homes should come prepared for isolation and with the adventurous spirit of the pioneers.

By the Author of "Days of '49"



CONTINUING

When the Bravest Trembled

By GORDON YOUNG

The Story Thus Far:

RAND LANISTER, accompanied by old Bill Raze, left Texas in the Spring of 1861 to join the Union Army. His mother, a Northern woman who had never been happy in the slave-holding South, had before her death made Rand promise never to fight against the men of her family. Rand's defection from the South estranged his father; angered his cousin, Val Lanister; puzzled his distant cousin Judith, who loved him. He arrived in Washington, a friendless youth, and was immediately arrested as a spy by the treacherous military police, because of his Southern accent and a pass through the Confederate lines which his uncle, General Lanister, had given him.

His release from the Capitol Prison, where the military police jailed all suspected persons, was arranged by a mysterious Laura Lorraine. She was said to have been raised as a daughter by the Willamotte family of New Orleans, till, on the eve of her wedding to Rand's cousin, Val Lanister, she was denounced as part-Negress. She had great influence with Union officers, including General Heckle, and acted as a spy for the North.

Rand, skeptical of the tale of her Negro blood, believed she was a Southern spy, for, curiously, she was a frequent visitor at Beauregard's headquarters in Virginia. Yet Rand was too loyal to Laura ever to expose her: To her he owed not only his release from prison, but his life; for she had shot and killed notorious Major Clarky of the military police when Clarky had confronted Rand in her house. Rand and Bill Raze had secretly buried Clarky's body. Then they had enlisted in William Tecumseh Sherman's regiment.

Sherman selected Rand as his orderly, his stated reason being Rand's bravery in rescuing Captain Terris, a staff officer, from a runaway horse. But Sherman also wanted to keep an eye on this scion of an old Southern family who was on friendly terms with the secret agent, Laura Lorraine.

Soon Sherman contrived to put Rand to the

test. He sent him to Washington with a message for Captain Silliker, a friend who had once been accused of cheating at cards in the South and who was perforce a Northern sympathizer. Sherman arranged Rand's assignment so that an encounter with Laura would be inevitable.

In Washington Laura insisted that Rand accompany her to the home of General Heckle. Rand complied, not wishing to reveal his errand to visit Silliker. General Heckle bluntly ordered Rand to go to Virginia and mingle with the Rebel forces of General Johnston.

"I'm no spy," Rand answered.

"But I order you!" exploded the general.

"And I refuse, sir!"

GENERAL HECKLE uttered incoherent sounds as if his mouth were filled with hot mush. His face turned the color of his gown.

"Y-you what?"

"They's no power in the Army to make a man, who don't want to play spy, do it." Rand had learned that from overhearing talk at Sherman's quarters. "And I don't want to."

"There is power in the Army to punish insolence!" Heckle shouted, as if addressing a regiment. "Y-you say *refuse?* To my face, *refuse?* T-to me?"

"I won't refuse duty you've got a right to order me to, but I ain't going to do that. No, suh!"

General Heckle stammered, belched and blustered. He stamped about on his spindle legs, and the crocheted slippers flopped off his feet. He swished the skirt of his purple dressing gown. Never in his life had he been so insulted, he said. He struck an attitude as if about to deliver a speech and began with—

"I—I am General Harvey Harrington Heckle, Chief of—"

Laura whispered with an affectionate air. Whatever she said probably warned him that Rand really had the best of the case; and that Colonel Sherman, who was a stickler about the rights of his men, might make a commotion if an attempt were made to punish his orderly.

"Y-you are a disgrace to the Army!" The general took another deep breath. "Be ashamed of yourself, sir." Rand calmly showed no sign of shame. "G-get out of my sight—report to your command!"

Rand wheeled without a salute and strode through the doorway.

"Tecumseh Sherman is an ass!" Heckle blustered. "Unfit for command—no discipline! There's an example. How did you happen to make such a mistake in your choice of that fellow?"

Laura answered humbly, looking sad—

"What man is to be trusted—ever?"

General Heckle instantly softened, cleared his throat, straightened his shoulders, pointed to his own breast and spoke encouragingly.

TWENTY minutes later Rand dismounted before the hotel where Silliker was staying. Dawn was in the air, refreshingly cool. A few people were stirring in the streets, still looking sleepy.

The night clerk lay across a desk, snoring. Rand shook him. The clerk wakened with a start, saw that Rand was a private and at once lapsed into peaceful yawning, stretching comfortably.

"Come on, hurry up," Rand urged. "The Army's waiting fo' me to get back so it can fight a battle! Where's Captain Silliker?"

The clerk grinned.

"So you're General Scott in disguise, hm? Well, General, you're the second soger that's woke me up durin' the last hour a-wantin' to see Cap Silliker."

Captain Silliker was fully dressed. His bed had not been touched. He sat in an armchair near a window with a table beside him, his long form stretched out. He looked sickly and weary, but somehow not weak. His brown, sunken eyes were mild, steady and watchful. He ran a long hand over his forehead and let the hand rest at the back of his head.

"I've got a message fo' you from Colonel Sherman. It's in my boot."

"Ah." Captain Silliker was impersonal.

Rand looked with interest at the man who had been everything from a private to a general, fought in all parts of the world, had cheated at cards, and could not get a commission because he was a Virginian. They were supposed to be distantly related.

Rand sat down, pulling at his boot. He shook the boot. A piece of folded paper fell to the floor. Captain Silliker read the message languidly and nodded.

"I'll be going." Rand turned toward the door.

"A moment. There's an answer."

The captain idly tore the message into bits, tossed the pieces toward a spittoon, again passed his hand over his forehead and let the hand remain at the back of his head.

"Lanister, you are from Texas, I believe?"

Rand nodded.

"Family all Southern?"

"My mother wasn't."

Captain Silliker nodded. There was a calmness about the captain that Rand wasn't sure of—didn't know whether he liked so much calmness. But the captain had deep brown eyes that seemed sad and honest. And Sherman liked him. That was a good deal in his favor.

"Lanister, I'd like to ask you a question. You may tell me to go to the devil if you want. Be all right. Perhaps I am too inquisitive."

"You want to know what I'm doing up North heah, I s'pose." Rand's voice was resentful.

The captain moved a hand, deprecatingly.

"Nothing so personal as that. I merely want to ask if Miss Lorraine isn't a friend of yours?"

"I know her to say 'howdy,' if that's what you mean."

"She is a very close friend of your family, though, isn't she—or used to be? Which is it?"

"Her dad and mine had some trouble onct, so she says."

"Oh, I see." The captain nodded as if quite satisfied with the answer. "But you and she are quite good friends now? That is, you like her very much, don't you?"

"Sho'ly, I like her. Colonel Sherman, he knows why I ought, too!"

"Ah." The captain meditated.

He reached to the table beside him and fingered a folded note that had been delivered about an hour before:

Dear Joe:

The woman Laura Lorraine has just called for my orderly, Lanister, on Heckle's authority and is taking him to Washington. Like everybody who knows her story, I was ready to believe that she might well have a vindictive hate toward the South. But just about ten minutes ago I decided that she has made an ass out of Heckle. I'm beginning to suspect that she has made one out of me, too. I'm afraid that if she hasn't already, she means to make one out of the boy.

I wouldn't have been surprised if she had done something to help one of the Louisiana Lanisters—but never a Texas Lanister! When a daughter of Willis Willamotte—or one who has been raised as his daughter—will try to save a son of Wallace Lanister from getting shot or hanged, then nobody up here in the North had better trust her information because he believes that she is spiteful, vindictive, unforgiving, and taking revenge.

I believe the boy is honest, but I want to make sure. So I have given him a note to you in which I say that I am beginning to suspect that the Lorraine woman is really serving Beauregard and hoodwinking Heckle. If he shows it to her, she won't let him deliver it. So if he does deliver it, give him a receipt.

I'm working hard to get you called to the front. Also hope for good news from the War Department about your commission. Looks like a battle tomorrow. We may win if the Rebels are half as unprepared as we are.

As ever, your friend,

—W. T. SHERMAN

Silliker looked up and observed Rand for a moment; then he asked—

"Lanister, what is your opinion of her loyalty?"

"Gosh a'mighty," said Rand all in a breath, "after the way I been arrested and neahly shot, and kicked about an'

cussed, I wouldn't accuse a nigger of not being loyal!"

Captain Silliker smiled slowly with a cryptic twist of his sensitive lips. The boy might be honest, but he was nobody's fool. The answer's evasiveness did not escape the captain; but he ignored it, and with a rather strange intonation asked—

"Not even a nigger, eh?"

"No, suh!"

"You know, of course, who Miss Lorraine really is—all about her, I mean?"

"I know on'y what she told me, and that's all."

"Then you really know very little about the lady."

He stood up. The moment he was out of the chair the captain's backbone stiffened erectly. He had a soldier's bearing. Civilian clothes couldn't disguise that. Standing, he bent over the table, took up a pen, wrote, then folded the note. He picked up a piece of wax, heated it and sealed the note.

"Here you are, boy. And I wish you luck," he said with aloof friendliness.

RAND overtook the column, which had left Vienna at daybreak on its way to Fairfax Courthouse. He rode rapidly down the side of the dusty road. Soldiers shouted at him derisively as, from that day until the end of the war, they were to shout at mounted orderlies and aides, often at generals. The individual impudence of the Federal soldiers was probably never equaled before or since by disciplined men. Even the wisest generals cherished that impudence as a part of the Army's morale and good spirit.

From the first the foot soldiers carried an ineradicable grudge against men on horseback, probably out of envy; but the feeling reached its imperishable expression in Fighting Joe Hooker's phrase—"Who the hell ever saw a dead cavalryman?"

Colonel Sherman was again irritably harassing stragglers and those officers who tolerated straggling. Other officers of high command might be—and many were—too dignified to range among the men, seeing what went on and speaking their minds freely. Sherman would dismount and fasten a recruit's knapsack properly, or show a sentry how to hold a gun when he challenged.

On this second day's march there was much more straggling. Men, their feet sore from yesterday's tramping, sneaked aside, meaning to wait for wagons. There were no wagons, unfortunately. Had there been, the opening battle of Bull Run would very likely have been a Union victory.

Sherman, on horseback, took the sealed note from Rand, read it at a glance and stuffed it into his pocket.

"What happened?"

"General Heckle, he wanted me to go to General Patterson as a spy. I wouldn't."

"Why not?" Sherman's glance roved up and down the column.

"Can I speak honest and not get cou't-martialed?"

Sherman laughed and flung out his arm silencingly.

"No. In that case, I would be for listening to you. Boy, General Harvy Harrington Heckle knows more about sauces and salads than any man in the Army—perhaps in America!"

CHAPTER X

THE GHOST OF MAJOR CLARKY

APPARENTLY the information that Laura Lorraine had brought from the Confederate lines to McDowell's headquarters was, even if unimportant, accurate. Time after time through the morning detachments of Rebels were sighted, but they fell back before the Union skirmishers. A few desultory shots were fired, that was all. Fallen trees and abatis were found in the road, but even these were not defended. The column halted while pioneers cleared the way.

It was hotter and dustier than the day before, and water was scarcer. But there was great excitement at being in Rebel country. Rumors and reports went down the column. Once a two-gun battery was ordered into position on rising ground. One shell was fired. The Rebels scampered, leaving blankets and knapsacks—an incident mentioned in McDowell's dispatch to Washington that night.

"Scairt o' us!" said the Army, jubilant. "On to Richmond!"

That night Tyler's division camped at Germantown, historic but too insignificant for most map-makers. The soldiers got out of hand and, in spite of McDowell's orders about Confederate corn and chickens, looted and burned houses.

The next day McDowell concentrated his columns at Centerville. There the soldiers, still disregarding the lax McDowell's orders, paraded the streets in female dress looted from homes; and one skylarking soldier in a parson's garb read, with mock solemnity, the burial service of Jeff Davis.

On the other side of Bull Run a Mississippi regiment proudly displayed an empty coffin with "Abe Lincoln" inscribed on the brass plate. They had promised the fair maidens of their home town to put him in it and bring him back home with them.

THE army that had tramped out of Washington with bands blaring and banners flying, having gone some twenty miles in two days at a sluggish, sore-footed pace, had to sit down and wait for wagons to come up with food and ammunition so it could fight a battle. And while it waited the Confederate general, Joseph E. Johnston, a Virginian, late Quartermaster-General, U.S.A, slipped out of Winchester and secretly started for Manassas.

General Scott, in Washington, was afraid he would do just that; and had ordered that he be watched closely. General Patterson—who carried silver service and china dishes with him on the campaign—with an army of sixteen thousand men was doing the watching. But Johnston got away so skilfully that, on the same day he left, Patterson telegraphed Washington thus:

> I HAVE SUCCEEDED IN KEEPING GENERAL JOHNSTON'S FORCES AT WINCHESTER.

Patterson had an army that outnumbered Johnston's almost two to one. But he did not know this salient fact, for Johnston made Patterson believe it was the other way round. Later in the war, when the Confederates were outnumbered almost two to one by McClellan, Johnston succeeded in giving the "Young Napoleon" also the delusion that it was the other way round; and McClellan grew so timid that Lincoln had to push, shove and peremptorily order him to fight.

Joe Johnston was the old gray fox of the Confederacy. He had been a soldier for thirty years, ten times wounded. He was to be wounded twice more, then die at the age of 84 of a cold caught while attending the funeral of General Sherman. Johnston was one of the most fearless of men, yet he would never light a coal oil lamp and was uneasy in a room with one burning.

While the Union Army waited at Centerville for its wagons, General Tyler, commanding the First Division, thought he would get some glory for himself by going ahead in person, with two companies and a small detachment of cavalry, to scare the Rebels. At noon, July 18th, he marched—without orders—three miles out along the dirt road to Blackburn's Ford on a little river called Bull Run.

Rand, shortly after dinner, was among those in camp who sprang up, listening to the distant *rat-tat-tat* of musketry and the boom of cannon. Soldiers blankly gazed at one another. They had as yet no way of judging how a battle ought to sound. Officers were

as uncertain as men. The long roll was beaten. Companies fell in. Regiments formed and waited.

An aide on a sweating horse rode furiously up the dirt road and shouted his alarm to Colonel Sherman. General Tyler, having called up one brigade to support him, was now ordering up Ayres's battery.

The battery set off at a gallop, headlong, as was the way of batteries. The firing in the distance grew heavier. This, then, was war.

In a few minutes it was much more like war. General Tyler had found some Rebels who evidently didn't read Northern newspapers; at least they did not seem to know they were supposed to run. Tyler was like the man who had a bear by the tail—he didn't know how to let go. So he sent urgent orders for Sherman's entire brigade to come and help him.

Bugles tooted, drums beat, battle flags were unfurled. The brigade fell into a column on the rough, dusty, country road. Bugles sounded the double-quick. Officers, already sweaty and hoarse, shouted. The column jogged. Muskets, bayonet-tipped, bounced on shoulders because the raw soldiers did not know enough to carry them at the port and officers forgot to tell them. It was midday and very hot. The battle flags sagged. Men could not double-quick with their folds overhead. Color guards fell out to wrap the banners.

"Close up!" rang along the column.

Sherman, impatient and a little irritable, rode up and down. The column ran. Blistered feet, somehow, did not hurt.

Rand, being off duty when the order came, was puzzled at what to do. He wasn't sure whether an orderly off duty ought to follow the commanding officer. There was no one to ask. All the staff officers were fretfully busy. Rand seized a rifle—he didn't know whose—and ran clumsily in his spurred jackboots to where his old company had fallen in. Sergeant Gnowtal, very rigid, pointed to the file closers. Captain Henry, alertly helpless, anxious to do the right thing, kept glancing at his sergeant.

When the double-quick began men broke loose, talking, calling out to one another. But jogging broke the words. They had to shout to make themselves heard above the pounding of feet, click and rattle of cartridge boxes, slap and thump of muskets.

"Close up!" the sergeant snapped.

"Close up!" echoed Captain Henry, puffing and wiping his face as he ran.

Rand found his boots heavy, and the spurs sometimes struck against his feet so that he had to jog spraddle-legged. The dust got into his nose and lined his mouth. He tried to swear, but his mouth was too dry.

The sound of the firing grew nearer. Now and then a cannon ball swished through the trees, smashing limbs and showering twigs and leaves. Men gaped nervously as the balls struck. The column halted. Orders came along the line. The firing had slackened. Company I was detached and sent forward. It met soldiers coming back, some wounded.

"We're licked!" one fellow shouted, waving empty hands.

He sounded as if he were hopeful of making the reenforcements afraid. Sergeant Gnowtal knocked him down with a musket butt.

"You'll git court-martialed!" another skulker cried, jumping well away from the fierce old soldier.

Captain Henry spoke anxiously to the sergeant, rebuking him.

"Was that the right thing to do, Sergeant?"

Rand overheard the noncom's reply.

"No, sir! You ort 've shot 'im. That would have been the right thing, sir!"

Captain Henry, with a flustered gesture, hastily wiped his face.

Company I was pushed forward. It passed Ayres's battery, returning. Men had their shoulders to the wheels. Every horse but one had been killed. Solid

shot was still crashing among the trees. In the distance across the river Rand could see the smoke of guns, but no soldiers.

The company advanced in line of skirmish, ready to fire. Men looked a little pale and tense but went on, lifting their feet high because they walked with eyes fixed ahead. A few spent bullets struck near them. They were ordered to halt and lie down. They waited. Some dead and wounded were carried past on the way to the ambulances. These belonged to the brigade Tyler had called out first.

After a time, Company I was ordered to withdraw. Company I breathed easier, but at once began swearing, aggrieved. It had been hurried for three miles along the dusty road, only to retreat. Some of the men complained valiantly.

History, being busy with the battle that followed two days later, has almost forgotten Tyler's reconnaissance, or so he called it, on the 18th; but it greatly affected the spirit of the men. There was no hiding from the Army—though Tyler tried to hide it from Washington—that the Rebels had been attacked in force and had repelled the Federals. For two days Tyler's division lay licking its wounds—19 killed, 36 wounded—in self-conscious disgrace at Centerville, waiting for the wagon train with food and ammunition.

McDowell, who later in the war was to court-martial a braver general than Tyler for a wiser mistake, treated Tyler's blunder mildly and occupied the two days in looking over the country. He discovered that the nature of the country made the battle plans, worked out on a smooth, polished desk at Washington, impossible. So, at the last moment, he had to improvise other plans. Moreover, there was no map of Virginia that could be depended on. Roads and fords were not given. Towns were not marked. Distances were not accurate. The Union Army was playing at a sort of blind man's buff.

THAT night, after the affair at Blackburn Ford, Rand went on duty. There was much talk and smoke and a great stir about headquarters, though Colonel Sherman was not present, having been called to a council. Officers galloped up, strode into the light with scabbards clanking, saluted, handed over dispatches and excitedly discussed the incidents of the day. Indignation predominated in voices that spoke of "masked batteries—unfair—ought to be barred from civilized warfare!"

Rand sat in the shadows. His feet ached as if they had been scalded. He wondered how he would get his boots off; or, having them off, get them on again. What was a battle and its losses, after excitement had died away, compared with aching feet? He sat moodily, paying no attention to the clatter and stir of the officers or of the bivouacking Army lounging about fires.

Voices from time to time rose in far call of, "Hi, Jack!" or "Ho, Billy—Bill-ee!" There were sudden, faintly heard oaths and the tinkle of gear. Horsemen now and then rode, always furiously, along the pike.

A man moved quietly up toward Rand from behind—a bulking, broad man who came as if he could see in the dark and move noiselessly as a shadow. He was squatting down when Rand turned, leaning forward and peering, and asked in surprise—

"Holy gosh a'mighty, where'd you come from?"

Mr. Raze crossed his legs, put his rifle in the crook of a forearm and began crumbling tobacco for his pipe. He spoke with calm satisfaction.

"We give you fellers a right smart lickin' today!"

"Bill, were you across the river?"

"I was. An' shootin', too."

"Damn youah soul!" Rand was indignant. "Bill, haven't you any princ'ples a-tall?"

"Nary a one."

"You might've hit somebody—even

me!"

"Didn't, did I?"

"Not even you can tell where a bullet's going!"

"Reckon I purt-near can if I shoot it. I'm keerful thataway."

"But you didn't shoot in earnest?"

"I never argy, Ran'."

"You are a sworn Union soldier, Bill!"

"I'm a sworn Reb, too, son."

"I don't believe that a mite!"

Mr. Raze smoked placidly and gazed at the starlight.

"You ain't, Bill?"

"Am too."

"Haven't you any honor a-tall?"

"Nope." Mr. Raze took the pipe from his mouth and spat. He put the pipe back in his mouth and puffed. Slowly, solemnly, he spoke, "The only honor I got er want is to stick to my friends. I got friends on both sides. I don't keer a whoop which side wins, on'y I don't want my friends hurt. This here whole war's all wrong. So one side's got as good a right to win as t'other."

"That's no way to talk, Bill."

"'F I'd been let alone I'd been all right. I'd just squatted down over here an' stayed. But the feller the colonel lent me to keeps wantin' me to go over thar to the Rebs an' larn things. Kin I go an' say, 'Folks, I'm a Yankee spy, come to nose inter your bizness, so tell me about yourselves? Where are your roads an' fords?' Kin I snoop around over thar without bein' seen an' axed questions? So I 'listed as a spy an' scout over thar, too. How else was I to do my duty?"

"But one side or the otheh'll find out and hang you, Bill!"

"'F they do I can't he'p it. Till they do, maybe I can. I tote more information from one side to t'other than any other scout. The colonels on both sides say so. I'm r'liable, too. Don't tell neither side lies about t'other."

"Damn youah soul!" Rand brooded, forgetful of his aching feet. "Why did you go and tell me? Now I can't do like I ought."

"How you ought, son?"

"I ought to stop you from giving the Rebs info'mation!"

Mr. Raze nodded gravely in agreement.

"Yep, you ought. Me an' *her* both!"

Rand felt his face grow hot. He started to say, "She saved my life!" But that wouldn't do. Counting up from babyhood misadventures, Bill had probably saved his life twenty times.

Rand was entangled as if in a net. He was a soldier, wanting to be loyal and do what was proper. He would shoot at strangers, fire at masses of men, take a soldier's risk and try to be brave about it; but he could not deliberately bring about the death of anybody he loved any more than he could shoot an unsuspecting Rebel in the back. If the tradition of gallantry required a good soldier to spare the back of an enemy, it certainly ought to permit him to spare the life of a friend.

"I come in tonight," said Mr. Raze, knocking the ash from his pipe on a boot heel, "to report the number o' Rebs I est'mate across yon. Thought I'd look f'r you. Now I got to go back an' report the number I est'mate over here. An' I'm truthful in my reports. Don't give nary side the best of it. That'd be lyin'. 'By, son."

Mr. Raze moved off, noiselessly. Rand rubbed his aching toes and wondered what ought to be done about such an unprincipled fellow as Bill.

COLONEL SHERMAN returned, followed by two or three men. Rand jumped forward to take the reins. Sherman swung off and gave him a keen look.

"You're the fellow I want. Just the fellow! Lieutenant!" Sherman turned to a young officer. "Take this horse. Come along, Rand."

Rand followed at the colonel's heels in among the officers. Sherman glanced about, said "Gentlemen!" inclusively,

spoke to his adjutant and flipped through a sheaf of papers, seeming scarcely to look at any one of the pages, yet giving instructions and making comments continuously. He handed them back.

"Come along, Rand. You, too, Captain."

In Sherman's private quarters a young officer sat on a small box before a larger pine box, copying orders and messages by lanternlight into a dispatch book for permanent record.

Sherman gave casual observers the impression of being a little rattle-brained, yet few officers were as meticulous with detail. He detested the stupidities of red tape and ignored it more than did any general; but he exacted minute care and accuracy with accounts and records.

The young officer glanced up as Sherman's brisk entrance set flimsy papers astir, clapped a reproachful hand on the records, sighed and leaned forward again. Like many men who came in contact with Sherman, the young clerical officer was bewildered, disapproving of the commanding officer whom he loved.

"Half sailor, half soldier, with a dash of snapping turtle," an admiral who knew him well was to say years later, with affection.

"Give me a light, somebody!" Sherman turned and flung out his hand, revealing a stale, half burned cigar.

"Here you are, Colonel."

Rand faced about, recognizing the voice. It was ex-Captain Silliker, still in civilian clothes, who had followed, holding out his own lighted cigar.

Sherman took it, jabbed it against his dead cigar, puffed and returned the cigar.

"Captain, you know my orderly."

Orderly and captain exchanged glances.

"Rand, I'm detailing you to do whatever the captain wants. Special duty. Better go out the back way." Sherman flourished an arm, pointing. "'By, and good luck, boys."

He watched them stoop and file out the back of the tent.

Sherman flung off his coat, opened a carpet bag and took out a half filled bottle of whisky. He picked up a cup and poured a drink, took one swallow and paused. He again tasted it cautiously and smelled it, eyeing the bottle with suspicion and the back of the secretarial officer with anger.

"Jim, you've watered my whisky again!"

The officer gave a start, spotted the page with ink, flushed and arose with a sort of defiant humility.

"Strong drink at a time of crisis—"

"If it's half the sin you think it is, then damn your soul to eternal perdition for making me take two drinks now—" Sherman poured a second—"when one would have been enough. Give me a match."

OUTSIDE in the darkness the captain laid a guiding hand on Rand's arm.

"This way, boy," he said, and turned toward the horses. "How good a liar are you?"

Rand answered cautiously—

"I allow fo' to hold up my end."

"I believe yo' told me yo' weah bo'n in Texas," said the captain quietly, with an extreme Southern accent.

"If you don't like the way I talk, go to hell!"

"Tut, tut, tut. Don't get so hot under the collar, boy. They've picked both of us for the same reason. I'm Southern too, but have lived among Yankees and other barbarians so long I've forgotten my native speech. I have a father, cousins, brother—half-brother, that is—and aunts over there." In the starlight he waved a soft hand leisurely southward. "I rode and hunted over most of this country as a boy."

They mounted, and the captain led the way into the village, past the squat, steeple-less stone church to a small dark house surrounded by a picket

fence. A sentry paced up and down before the door. Inside the house the captain lighted a candle.

The people of the cottage had fled in haste before the advance of Yankees, the whole countryside having been terrified by tales of Northern ferocity.

"Vandals and Huns, these Yankees," the Richmond newspapers said, proceeding to cite the fantastic oaths of the New York toughs, Billy Wilson's Zouaves.

The captain removed his hat and rubbed his forehead as he gazed at the open drawers of a bureau, hastily ransacked by the departing owners; at a trunk, with contents pitched about, at a child's clothing scattered over the floor. He uttered low, sad sounds of sympathy. A child's storybook lay on its leaves, face down, tossed roughly aside by some anxious elder not wishing to be burdened with trifles at a time of flight.

"How do you feel, boy, to know that women and children are afraid of you?"

Rand's eyes widened in protest. The captain nodded.

"Napoleon was a liar. The worst men —if he said it—do not make the best soldiers. I've fought with and against both kinds."

He took up the candle and passed from one small oval-framed photograph to another, as if idly looking for some one he might recognize, and murmured with a shake of his head:

"All strangers. I used to know every man, woman and child in the whole countryside."

In passing a mirror, the captain stared at himself for a time as if his own image were that of a stranger. He replaced the candle on a table, wiped his face and muttered an oath as if something hurt.

"Lanister?"

"Yes'r."

"A good old name, 'Lanister'." He gazed as if judging whether or not Rand was worthy of a good old name, but gave no sign of his opinion. "Lanister, it's damnable, war is. Yet damned fascinating. Bugles, drums, banners; clatter of hoofs on the frozen road, creak of leather, clank of scabbards, gleam of sabers! But a thing like this—" he stooped, picking up the child's much thumbed picture book—"dims the glamor."

For a moment he looked at the pictures, though perhaps less at the pictures than at the smudges made by tiny fingers. He laid the book gently aside on a table.

"Come along," said Captain Silliker. He took up the candle, leading the way to the kitchen.

The floor was bare boards, white with much scrubbing, but dirty now with the tracks of many feet. The open cupboard shelves ran the width of the side wall, with dishes and pans. A red fringed tablecloth was on the table. Piled there was a loose bundle of gray clothes with bright buttons. On the floor were two saddles, bridles, two pairs of boots and even of spurs.

The captain began to handle the clothes. He held up a fine blouse; each shoulder was studded with a silver bar. He pitched it toward the end of the table where Rand stood, puzzled and reluctant.

"This is where you are brevetted first lieutenant, C.S.A, Lanister. For my part, this other one will do. We bagged a lieutenant and a sergeant."

"Are we to be spies?"

The captain looked up, but said nothing. His brown eyes were searching. He nodded.

Rand took off his hat and held it above his head as he scratched behind one ear, then looked at the floor. He flung his hat at the table.

"I don't like being a spy."

"You are hanged in short order, that's true." The captain was almost acquiescent.

"'Tain't that so much, but it don't seem fair! Making folks think you are a friend when you are an enemy."

"All's fair in love and war."

"Like hell!" Rand looked at him with instant challenge.

The captain shrugged, but his look was steady.

"What is to be done then?"

"I reckon the colonel might think I was scairt if I backed out. I'd do 'most anything fo' Colonel Sherman."

"And so would I!" said the captain.

"He's been youah friend, too?"

"Almost the only friend I have in America, boy."

"He sho' saved my neck!"

"Yes?" The captain was mildly skeptical, with a twinkle of amusement. "He seems to think it was Miss Lorraine who did that, so he told me today." Then, pointing to the Confederate uniforms, "But what about these? Do we put them on?"

"I don't want the colonel to think I'm scairt." Rand at once sat on a stool and began to pull at his boots. He tugged violently. "I reckon I'll have to cut these boots off. My feet swelled today, double-quickin' down to that river." He took a knife from his pocket, opening the blade. "Run fo' miles, and neveh fired a shot. Feels funny going into battle. I couldn't have hit nothing nohow today. 'F I wasn't scairt, then I was sho'ly sick at my stomick a little."

The captain smiled cautiously. He had taken off his coat, now stepped from his trousers and stood in underwear. He walked near and looked at the boots.

"I wouldn't cut them. Fine leather. Stick up your foot and hold on."

Rand straightened out his leg; the captain pulled and jerked until the boot was loosened.

"Now the other."

"Seems funny to have a captain pulling at my boots."

"I am not a captain."

"The colonel calls you captain."

"That was my rank when I left the Army. Colonel Sherman thinks I should still have the title."

"He told me you'd been in otheh armies."

"Did any one tell you why I left the American Army?"

"Something about cards," said Rand and wished he hadn't spoken.

"Yes. I won that night—in my own quarters, too. Then somebody discovered that the cards were marked. Would you have believed I didn't know they were marked?"

Rand said promptly—

"That all depends."

"Depends on what?"

"Depends on whetheh or not in otheh ways I'd think you was a fellow that would cheat. An innocent man can get hisself into a lot of trouble if he ain't lucky. Look what happened to me there in Washington that first day!"

"Now soak your feet in water, soap them well, then put these boots on again. They'll pass. But change the spurs. I don't know how sharp eyed our friends over there will be, but it is best to be careful. And in my case, William T. Sherman was one of the officers playing poker that night."

"And he wouldn't believe you'd done it?"

"No."

"Then I reckon you hadn't," said Rand, satisfied.

WHEN Rand was fully dressed he tried not to look as if he felt too pleased with the fine feathers of the luckless Confederate officer whose clothes he wore; but he could not help wishing that the little silver bars were on Federal blue and his by right of commission.

The captain arranged the saber scabbard and belt.

"These clothes came off of a very proud young man, Lanister. I talked with him. He said, and no doubt believed, that he would rather give up his life than his uniform. Called me a low-bred Yankee. Said he could tell by the smell. War gives people queer notions. You are forgetting your revolver. Here."

The captain picked up belt and revolver, opened the holster and took out the new model Colt.

"Fine gun, this. Confederate not likely to own one like it. Very late model, but—" he held the revolver near the candle and scrutinized it for a moment "—but you can say you took it from a captured Yankee."

The captain turned to his own coat that lay neatly folded on a chair. He reached to an inside pocket, drew out a small black notebook and, turning a few pages, studied a notation. He whistled softly as he stooped and replaced the book in the coat pocket.

"Let me see the revolver again, Lanister. There aren't many of that model in use yet."

Rand handed it over and went on admiring himself in the fine Rebel uniform.

The captain inspected the gun closely. He turned to the candle and for some moments stood between Rand and the light.

"Very fine gun." He rammed the gun into its holster. "But if you are questioned about it, don't say you took it from a captured man. Say you took it off a dead Yankee!"

Rand looked about quickly, but saw only the captain's back. He was whistling again, softly.

The captain had the sentry call the corporal, and the corporal carried word to the officer of the day; then presently a cavalry escort came. Rand and the captain, having changed their horse gear for that of the captured Confederates, were taken by the cavalry through the lines and passed out beyond the last picket.

From there they rode over a faint, weed grown sort of wagon trail that wound between a hazel thicket and a cornfield. They had not gone more than two or three hundred yards, trotting easily, stirrup to stirrup, when the captain said:

"Slow down a minute, Lanister. There is something I want to ask."

Rand stopped. The captain put his horse about, facing him.

"Why the devil did you dress Clarky as a private after you killed him?"

Rand sat very rigid with head up, completely surprised. In the starlight he could not see the captain's face clearly, but he had the feeling that the captain could see his as if in sunlight.

"I neveh killed him!"

"Then how do you happen to be carrying his revolver? I wondered how a private would come by such a late model, then thought the number seemed a little familiar."

"I neveh killed him, I tell you!"

"Come, come. I think I had better take you back to the Army, under arrest!"

Before Rand could say anything, the captain, with an air of being startled, exclaimed—

"What was that?" and turned in his saddle, peering, listening, waiting—with his back to Rand.

When he looked about, Rand was still sitting rigidly in the saddle, with head up.

"My duty requires me to arrest you, Lanister. Come along. We are going back." The captain added encouragingly, "Unless you want to stop here awhile and tell me how it happened?"

Rand shook his head, afraid to try to talk. His tongue might slip.

"I neveh killed him!"

"All right. We will let a court-martial decide that. Come along!"

The captain rode in front, not once turning his head. Rand, in troubled anxiety, followed. He thought of wheeling his horse and dashing blindly for the Confederate lines, somewhere over there in the dense shadows. It was merely a random thought and had no weight. He was baffled and angry that the scoundrel Clarky should, even in death—a death everybody approved, too—still hold a noose above his head.

The challenging yelp of the picket rang out—

"Halt!"

"It's all right!" the captain called loudly.

"Halt! Who goes there?" repeated the sentry.

"We're the men that were just passed through your lines. Got turned around!"

The captain reined about and said cheerily—

"Come on, Lanister. I've made a mistake!"

"Halt! Halt 'r I'll fire!"

"Fire away all you like!" the captain answered coolly. "Come on, boy!" He pulled at the reins of Rand's horse, lashed it with bridle reins and spurred his own mount.

Rand, much puzzled, vaguely relieved but unhappy, too, stayed at the captain's side as they galloped away from the picket.

The picket fired—a winking spurt of fire cutting the shadows. Hasty cries of alarm sounded; then other shots followed, all harmless.

"Hope the Confederate pickets are near enough to hear those muskets," said the captain gaily. "Bolster up our story. And now, boy, we had better stop so you can put nipples back on that revolver. I still believe you killed Clarky, or had a hand in it. But I have proved to my own satisfaction what I chiefly wanted to know about you: You won't shoot when a man isn't looking!"

"How'd they eveh get off?" Rand fingered the revolver. "And I didn't kill him."

"If you didn't, you know who did. It amounts to the same thing in law, especially military law. I took the nipples off tonight. And if I had heard the click of a hammer when my back was turned, I'd have made sure of hanging you. But as it is, I have seen too much of the world to hang an honest boy — in war time, at least — for the death of a miserable scoundrel! Clarky was just that. Now come along. We'll have time to talk more about this yet tonight."

CHAPTER XI

A CONFESSION

THE horses' hoofs struck the small bed of a stony creek. Rand and the captain paused in the shadows to let their horses drink. The little stream ran murmuringly.

As the horses started up a voice called from the bank before them:

"Halt thar!" The click of a musket hammer being cocked sounded clear and near. "Who ahr yo' all?"

"Who the hell do you think!" said the captain with a Southern drawl and good natured impatience. "Friends, without the countersign. Didn't you hear us rile the Yankee outpost over there?"

"I hea'd shootin', sho! Co'p'l, these heah is ouah men."

"'Vance, yo' all," said the corporal. "But if yo' ahr Yanks—"

"Don't be a fool!" the captain told him.

They rode across the creek and up the bank, where peering men laid hold of their bridles. These were the rawest of recruits—not in uniform and probably on outpost duty for the first time.

Captain Silliker swung from his horse and talked, perfectly at ease. Had he been a Rebel officer he could not have been more sure of himself. Rand thought, "I've got to watch him close and learn."

"Come on, Lieutenant. Pile off. We went out to wake up the Yankees and got turned around! These boys will give us coffee and set us right, won't you?"

"Sho'! Yo' bet! Yo' all been scoutin'?"

The corporal led the way along a footpath for a few rods to where a camp-fire glowed, sheltered by a mound. Others of the picket guard came straggling along, peering closely at the strangers in fine uniforms.

"Yo' uns is Vi'ginins, ain't yo'? We all is frum Mi'sippi. We uns b'long tew

Pap Reed's reg'ment."

They had no other semblance of uniform than a white rag tied to their left arms. They wore huck shirts and butternut trousers; the arms they carried were squirrel rifles, flintlocks, shotguns and knives. Tall, angular boys, lazily lithe of movement, with a sad look in their staring eyes, a kind of sadness in their slow, good natured smiles. One man set the coffee pail on the glowing ash at the side of the fire.

"You boys are a long way from home," said the captain, lolling on the leafy mound.

"Ye'suh, we uns is. An' we uns is gwine tew stay till the Yanks tu'n tail—"

"Won't take long, I reckon," said one boy, deftly popping a live coal, picked up between thumb and forefinger, into a corncob pipe bowl.

"Him thah is mighty youngun fo' tew be an off'cer." A lanky Mississippian pointed at Rand. "An' them is sho' p'etty clothes!"

"Git 'em all mussed up in a tussle," said a voice, not unhopefully.

"Do yeh think, suh, them damn Yanks 'll fit any?"

"I hope so!" said Captain Silliker.

"This heah is gwine be right sma't gougin' match, I reckon."

"Somebody's comin', Co'p'l."

"Yell at 'im," said the corporal, without interest.

"Halt thar!"

A voice answered from the wood.

" 'Sall right, Pete. 'S me!"

"Sho'! Thet's Pap," said Pete, as if he felt a little silly to have challenged Pap.

A tall, bewhiskered man in a battered felt hat, coatless, with a piece of red rag fastened to his shoulder, came shuffling up. He had no firearms—only a long butcher knife thrust through the cloth at his waistband and a switch in his hand. A lop-eared hound followed at his heels.

"Boys," he said jubilantly, "she's cume. I jes' been made a sho' 'nough cunnel! Yessuh! Fellah came with the papah an' a man read it fo' me. Cunnel Reed, by heaven. Huh, huh, me! Shucks!" With bashful pride, "Jeff Davis hisself signed it. Ol' Jeff, he's f'um Mis'sippi hisself."

The boys exclaimed proudly, but were scarcely stirred. One boy thrust out a long hand, and Colonel Reed grasped it.

"Thankee, Tom. Thankee!"

"Hell," said Tom, "I want a chew!"

Pap laughed and started to hand over a half used stick of twist, then took a bite.

"Bettah git mine fust. Yo' doggone younguns 'll eat it up!"

"We uns got comp'ny, Pap."

Colonel Reed came close, staring. The hound dog had sniffed the captain; he turned to Rand, smelled of his boots, edged closer, warily watching for a kick from the boots. He peered with sad eyes at Rand's face, then crept nearer, sniffing trousers and coat. The dog turned half around and settled down close to Rand.

"Howdy," said Colonel Reed.

Captain Silliker and Rand arose respectfully in the presence of the colonel. The captain saluted. Colonel Reed flourished his switch.

"Shucks, set down, boys. Yo' thah ahr sho' Suthun, boy! Thet houn' ain't made up to nary a strangeh yit, 'cept one o' the Geogey boys. Bes' damn ol' yallah coon houn' in Mi'sippi." The colonel squatted on his haunches. "W'en mah boys he'h git some fancy duds they'll be powehful fine lookin' sogers, don' yo' think?"

The colonel gazed proudly at his boys, who were dividing his stick of twist.

"Reckon I'll hev tew git me a biggeh piece o' rag tew show I'm a full-fledged cunnel, eh? Pete, yo' sis give yo' a red flannel un'er shirt—"

"Boys done cut thet up fo' gun rags, Pap."

"Ain't thet tew bad! A red flannel shirt tail flappin' on mah shouldah 'ud made the Yanks think I was maybe a gin'l!" He chuckled. "Whah yo' all f'um, huh?"

Captain Silliker told him—at least told him what he wanted the colonel to believe. Rand scratched the hound's ears, listening. They talked of war. The unsuspecting colonel told what regiments were near, naming the officers in command, and what he had heard of others; he said folks believed old Joe Johnston was coming with his army to help Beauregard.

A boy clanked two grimy tin-cups together, bottoms up, knocking out old grounds. He pushed the bubbling coffee with the bottom of a cup and dipped it quickly; then he did the same with the other, and handed the cups to Rand and the captain.

"I'll take some tew, Billy," said the colonel. He stretched out on the ground, waving aside the cup the captain offered. "Yo' go right ahayd. I promised Mr. Judd tew be home in time fo' to he'p with the log sawin' nex' month. So I hope this he'h wah is hurried up. They is some mighty lonesome girls back home waitin' fo' my boys—" He grinned, turning to look about.

The boys grinned too and, nervously awkward, poked at the dirt with toes and fingers.

Colonel Reed, followed by his dog, led the way back to camp, through the woods, with Rand and the captain on foot beside him. The camp was about a mile away. When they were challenged, the colonel gave the password loudly, admitting his companions too.

The army was without tents; but the colonel had a covered wagon for his headquarters.

He talked affectionately of his boys. They had all pitched in and elected him colonel; but he hadn't really supposed Jeff Davis would let a plain old woodhog like himself be one. Well, he was goin' tew try mighty hard for to make sure Jeff would never be sorry. Yes, suh!

"We can make our way from here," said Captain Silliker, mounting.

On the way out of the camp they were challenged; but Captain Silliker had the password. He had overheard the colonel give it.

THEY crossed Bull Run at a ford and about an hour later clattered over a narrow bridge and entered a village of a half dozen houses. No one was astir. The captain said:

"I'm not sure. Better ask."

He turned from the road toward a house surrounded by a fence of slab pickets, dismounted, pushed through the gate and battered loudly on the door.

An unseen woman called through a window—

"What yo' want?"

"Is this the way to Wayteville, ma'am?"

"Yo' ahr a soger?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"God bless yo'! Jus' yo' wait a minute!"

The woman was middle aged with thin hair falling down over her shoulders. She stood, candle in hand, wearing a nightgown with a shawl hastily thrown about her.

"Can't I give yo' a snack? God bless yo'! All my men folks is with the ahrmy. Blevins is ouah name. No Blevins bettah come home if they let the Yanks whip 'em!"

She gave directions for the Wayteville pike and called blessings after them as she stood in the doorway, candle held high, watching the horsemen ride away and merge with the dusty, dark road.

"If all women down heah is like her," said Rand admiringly, "I reckon the Rebs 'll take a lot o' pains not to go home licked!"

"Hmm." The captain was meditative. "Do you know what the South thinks it is fighting for?"

"Niggers."

"No. The North thinks that. The South thinks it is fighting for *liberty*—the same thing that Washington fought for. And there is probably as much racial difference—there is actually more!

—between the North and the South today than there was between the American colonists and the British of '76."

"But it is fo' niggers, ain't it?"

The captain gestured ambiguously.

"What a man believes may not be the truth, but there is no chance for the truth to get into his head unless it happens to conform to his belief. So there is no use arguing with either side about the causes of this war—or any other war! About the best we can say is that there would have been no cause for the animosities that have produced this war if there had been no niggers."

"But you don't think the Union ought to be busted up, do you?"

"No," said the captain quietly, "I don't. But—" He stopped.

"But what?"

"But in spite of that, I would have gone home to fight for the South except that every man who looked at me would think, 'No gentleman. Can't be trusted. He cheated at cards!' "

"Don't they know about it up North too?"

Silliker smiled with bitterness.

"It's bad enough up there, too. But it doesn't mean the same thing, boy. The North forgets more quickly. That sort of thing brands you in the South as if a hot iron had burned the word *blackleg* on your forehead. I was on my way to Cuba to fight against the Spaniards when war broke out up here."

"You like the fighting, hm?"

The captain asked a little harshly:

"How about yourself? Are you fighting to save the Union or free the niggers?"

Rand brooded, perplexed; then he said:

"The South can keep its damn niggers. We don't want 'em in Texas. And to free 'em would be stealing."

And that, in spite of history's distorted way of telling about freeing the slaves, was the sentiment of most Union soldiers. Lee freed his Negroes; Grant, or at least Grant's wife, owned Negroes until the end of the war. McClellan ordered from camp entertainers who sang abolitionist songs to the soldiers. Halleck forbade soldiers in camp or on the march to receive runaway Negroes; and Nelson whipped slaves to make them return to their masters. When the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, many officers mutinously refused to obey it, and some resigned.

AN HOUR or so later they stopped before a small stream at the foot of a hill to let their horses rest. The captain and Rand sat on a soft, grassy bank by the roadside. The captain drew cigars from his pocket. For some time they smoked in silence, the captain turning his cigar every few puffs and looking at the red glow.

"Tell me, boy—" his hand fell reassuringly on Rand's arm—"how was Clarky killed?"

Rand sat bolt upright.

"I didn't do it. That's all I'm going to tell anybody."

"But you know who did?"

No answer.

"Did Captain Terris have anything to do with it?"

"Him? Why him and Clarky was friends!"

"Yes, I know. But both loved the same woman. Did he?"

"I hate that fellow like I hate a bad smell. But, no, he didn't!"

The captain mused. Then, whether suspiciously connecting Laura Lorraine with the Clarky affair, or merely wishing to talk of her, he said:

"You know, don't you, that Miss Lorraine is suspected of actually being a Rebel spy while representing herself as a Union sympathizer and agent?" He added impressively, "That, you know, is an unpardonable military crime!"

Rand patted the Confederate gray that he wore.

"Well, ain't we Yank spies?"

"True," said the captain pliantly. "I believe you once said that you knew nothing about the lady except what she

herself had told you?"

"That's right. Sho' is."

"I know much more than that about her. Colonel Sherman told me. He used to be in New Orleans."

"He don't like her, does he?"

"Well, no, I suppose he doesn't." The captain had an air of judicial precision. "But he is sorry for her—except that he believes she is a spy. Sherman is a gentleman. Too much of a gentleman to give her story to the scandalmongers of Washington. Though he does wonder a little why everybody doesn't know it, since Terris does!"

"If Terris wants her to marry 'im, he wouldn't want the story spread, would he?"

"Probably you are right. But I think I'll tell you about her. I have discovered that you know how to keep your mouth shut."

"I'm sho'ly intahrested."

"You know, don't you, that many girls—especially in and about New Orleans—even though tainted with Negro blood, are so nearly white that nobody excepting the Recording Angel and the overseer's bookkeeper can tell that they are slave-born. You may have heard about the quadroon balls?"

"Neveh did."

"Some of the old time planters used to make quite a point of raising pretty slaves. Pure white, some of them—even with red hair. That is, pure white to the eye but not on the plantation records. The Willamottes were known some years ago for their beautiful women. Slaves also, I mean. Nearly, or more than nearly, white. I come of a slave-owning family, boy. But the Sillikers always wanted their slaves black."

"Gosh a'mighty! You don't mean Miss Laura ain't white!"

"I'm telling this story," said the captain mildly. "About two years ago Miss Laura, as I may as well call her, since you do, became engaged to a proud young man of distinguished family. Very distinguished family. You understand?"

"I got a queer feeling!"

"An old Negress who had been Miss Laura's nurse somehow got money to buy her own freedom. She was old and rheumatic, so it didn't cost much. But how in the world she even got the hundred dollars or so must ever remain a mystery. Anyhow, as soon as she was a free nigger she went to the proud young man and told him that Miss Laura was a slave's child."

"Gosh a'mighty! I bet he neahly died!"

"She told him that she had let the less than a week-old Willamotte baby fall, and it had died within a few minutes. She said that she was terrified. Afraid even for her life. The Willamottes were a high-tempered people. She went to a young slave mother—nearly white, you understand—who had a week-old girl baby. Pure white, to the eye. She persuaded the slave mother to change the living babe for the dead. So Miss Laura grew up as a daughter of the Willamottes. A dark creole family, you know. No one suspected."

"I thought fingernails would show?"

"Many people do think so. Many don't."

"And something about the whites of the eyes?"

"Wait until I finish. Then judge for yourself. You can—or perhaps you can't—imagine the feelings of both families. They tried to keep it a secret, but didn't, quite."

"I'd neveh tell a thing like that!"

"I am sure you wouldn't. The Willamottes were horrified. They didn't know what to do. She had been raised as their daughter. But of course she had to go. They couldn't send her to the slave quarters or to the marketplace—not even if they had wanted. Which, of course, they didn't. But they couldn't possibly keep her in their home."

"Hell, I'd 'a' kept her!"

"Well, boy, the father of the proud young man who had nearly married her

remained her friend. So did the proud young man, and all of his brothers and sisters. Marriage, of course, was out of the question. That simply could not be. But in spite of the old hag's tale, they treated the girl with much more tenderness than her own family. They recognized that, whatever her shame about it, Miss Laura herself was blameless. And you can see that it was the greatest disgrace that could befall a proud Southern girl. She couldn't remain in New Orleans after that. She was well provided with money. Her family was generous in that respect, I understand. They wanted her to leave the country. She did and—"

"And that's why the darn fools up here think she hates the South, ain't it?"

"Yes, Rand, the darn fools do!" Captain Silliker smiled. "Do you know what the quarrel was between her father and yours?"

"No. But my dad's easy to quarrel with 'f you don't agree with him fast!"

"Not even Colonel Sherman knows just what that trouble was over. But your father used a whip on her father, Rand. And that is the most disgraceful thing that can happen to a white man in the South."

"My holy gosh!" Rand exclaimed, breathless. "No wonder she said she ought to hate me!"

"Yes. But apparently she doesn't. In other words, Rand, your Miss Laura is not malicious and vindictive. And instead of wanting to see the South whipped and punished for her disgrace, I believe that she wants to serve it so loyally and courageously that she will be respected even by those who think she is a nigger."

"I don't believe she's a nigger!" Rand said angrily.

"No way to prove that she isn't. The old Negro nurse is dead. Died soon after she told her story."

"Bet somebody killed her."

"That is not unlikely. Her body was found in a canal. But she drank a great deal, especially after being supplied with money. Perhaps she did fall in."

"Served her right."

"Yet the plantation records do show that the nearly white slave's new-born baby died when Mrs. Willamotte's Laura was three days old. There you are."

"But wouldn't Mrs. Willamotte know her own baby? You can't fool a cow on a ten-minute-old calf! Ain't women smart as cows?"

"Some are not as maternal. Many pretty Southern mothers leave babies in the care of servants altogether. I, for instance, was raised by a black mammy. My mother scarcely knew me. Or rather, I scarcely knew her. Perhaps Mrs. Willamotte was such a mother. Perhaps not. She died years and years ago. The slave mother was long ago sold to a Frenchman, who took her as his mistress to nobody knows just where. Martinique, some say. So nobody can ever know the truth about Miss Laura. The blot simply can not be wiped from her name."

"She was going to marry my cousin

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Valentine, wasn't she?"

"Yes."

RAND muttered curses, sympathetically.

"Yo' know, Terris said it was Val told that story about her, and 'twas why she hated Val."

"The people who do not know the real truth of the matter might very easily think that your cousin did jilt her. Their engagement had been announced."

"Yes, but Terris knows. On'y he don't know, she said, how she really feels toward my uncle. I don't believe she is a nigger. What d'you think?"

"What do I think?" the captain repeated contemplatively. "I really haven't a right to an opinion."

"You got some sort of a notion!"

"Well, then, from what I know of Negroes, I think that if the old nurse really had changed babies, you could have torn her with hot pincers, boiled her in oil, dragged her behind wild horses, and she never, never would have admitted it. That's what I think. It doesn't mean that I am correct."

"I sho' hope yo' are!"

"No one will ever know. But now you must tell me something."

Rand stiffened, dropped the cold cigar and raised his head, bracing himself against being wheedled.

"Your Miss Laura can do more harm than a thousand soldiers. Perhaps more than ten thousand. We have to protect our Army. Do everything that is honorable to help our side. Save the lives of men. Win battles. So tell me, is she a spy?"

Rand swallowed hard. His mouth felt very dry. He had grown to like this captain. He did not know what to say, so said nothing.

"Of course, if you won't deny it, then you tell me very clearly that you know she is." The captain was calm, without triumph; merely logical.

"I don't downright know that she is, no!"

"But you believe that she is?"

"And I don't blame her!"

"You have been sheltering a spy, boy. There is nothing more serious in war time. Perhaps you didn't know that?"

"Oh I knew it all right, but—"

"But?"

"She saved my life. Got me out of jail. I'm willing to fight for the Union. Do anything a soldier ought. But I won't have a woman like her get shot or hung or whatever they'd do to her. I just won't!"

Captain Silliker, Virginian, hummed softly to himself and gazed overhead at the stars twinkling through the interstices of dense branches. Rand had no way of knowing how very much his answer pleased the captain.

"Very well. I'll make a bargain with you, boy. From a military point of view I shouldn't, I know. But law can be cruelly unjust even when it rightfully punishes. So let us make a bargain. I'll see to it that your Miss Laura has warning enough to get safely into the Confederate lines, and stays there, if you will tell me how Clarky was killed."

"I swore I'd neveh tell!"

"Who made you swear? Miss Laura?"

"I swore myself. She neveh asked me."

"Ah," said the captain. "Then she knows all about it, eh? If she is arrested for that, no doubt the truth will come out."

"No, it won't!" Rand said in a flash with determination almost like anger. "You arrest her, and I'll swear I killed him and get hung fo' it myself!"

"You love her that much, boy?"

"Love 'er! I don't love her a-tall! But that Clarky would've shot me. She shot 'im! That's how it was. But if you or any man thinks I'm going to let a woman—any woman—get hung fo' doing what I ought to 've done myself, yo' are crazy!"

Captain Silliker relighted his cigar and mused with one outstretched hand on Rand's leg. He patted the leg reassuringly.

THEY climbed the hill before them and found daylight coming. The captain again stopped and from his saddle looked long at the country, ridged with wooded, lonely hills, interspersed with fertile, cultivated valleys. He breathed deeply of the morning's cool fragrance, and exhaled with a sound of sighing. A pale blue haze floated like a garment against the wooded hillsides.

They trotted down the winding, dusty road; and presently ahead of them they saw two small children—two little girls in loose dresses, barefoot and bareheaded. The elder was about seven and held the younger's hand. They turned at the sound of hoofs, and peered, withdrawing like small wild things near the thicket at the roadside, ready to vanish; then, seeing that the horsemen were in gray, they stood beaming. Their tanned little faces lighted like masks before candles. Each waved a hand, the younger shyly pressing against her sister.

"Her was scaiht yo' uns was Yanks!" said the older in a bold piping voice.

"Yanks!" exclaimed the captain, indignant.

The children giggled.

"'F yo' uns was Yanks an' I sayed boo! yo' uns 'ud run, 'udn't yo'?" The older maid was hopeful. "Aunt Liza says yo' 'ud run!"

"If Aunt Liza said it, I'm sure Yanks would run," the captain admitted. "And what are you pretty maids doing out so early in the morning?"

"We uns is goin' to aunty's fo' all day!"

"And where does aunty live?"

"Down the pike an' up the crick." The little maid gestured with a wide sweep of her arm, her eyes following the gesture as if she saw through the thicket.

"May two gallant soldiers have the honor of escorting you to Aunt Liza's?" They were motionless, troubled and uncomprehending, until the captain said, "Do you want to ride?"

The children looked at each other, grinned, poked their toes in the dust, wriggling bashfully and edged closer.

The captain helped the older girl to climb up behind him. Rand leaned from the saddle, lifted the smaller child and held her snugly in his arms.

They turned off the road when they came to the creek and followed wagon tracks through the thickets until they reached a small clearing where a cabin stood among shaky fences and tumbledown sheds. Dogs came at a run, barking furiously. The older child in shrill indignation scolded them by name.

"Yo' mean ol' things fo' to yap at ouah sogers!"

The smaller girl complacently sucked her thumb and smiled shyly at Rand, playing a little game of peekaboo from the corners of her eyes.

A tall woman came to the open cabin door, shaded her eyes with one palm, then strode out. Both children began to wave and call to her.

"Howdy!" said the woman. Her voice was harsh but welcoming. "You all light down an' set!" The invitation was a command. "Is the Yanks licked?"

"Not yet," said the captain.

"Ain't you all a long way f'um the ahrmy then?"

"Not so far off as General Johnston! We are out to see if he is coming."

"Hen an' all mah boys is with the ahrmy. An' yo' jus' know they'd bettah not come traipsin' home till eveh Yank is cla' outa the count'ee! Ef I knowed of ary able-bodied man thet wasn't with the ahrmy I'd go tew him an' take a pettiskirt an' say, 'Yo' git right outa them thah britches an' weah this he'h!' An' does Gen'l Beauregard need Johnston? He ain't scai't, I hope!"

"Indeed not," said the captain, helping his small companion to slide from behind him to the ground, where she began indignantly to argue with the dogs for having barked at her and the "sogers."

The woman reached up for the little girl in Rand's arms.

"Maybelle, yo' ought tew be mighty proud o' yo'self fo' havin' a real off'ceh tote yo'! What paht the count'ee yo' boys f'um?"

"I am from this part. My name is Silliker."

"Land o' Goshen! Yo' a Silliker? Sakes alive!" She was flustered, and a little timid of saying, "Ef yo' uns ain't had breakfus', I'd be mighty proud fo' to give yo' all what they is."

"Thank you. And we, proud to accept."

While they were getting feed for their horses, Rand said:

"I don't like this. It ain't fair. She thinks we're her soldiers. I'd ratheh miss my breakfast."

"Hm—hm!" The captain was amused. "You protect a spy, yet are squeamish about getting breakfast off an enemy?"

"No woman ain't my enemy. Not even if she is Jeff Davis's own wife, she ain't!"

"Ah, no? I rather think Mrs. Davis would call you a liar, boy!"

AN HOUR later they rode away, returning to the pike, with the woman's blessing and the children waving their tiny hands in farewell.

"These women heahabout sho'ly have got spunk," said Rand. "Po' Rebs is bound to catch hell. Yanks out in front of 'em, women folks behind 'em. Going to be a big wah!"

"A big war, boy. The North has the weight of numbers and wealth, industries and ships. The South has the temper that endured Valley Forge. Most of our poor whites have the old blood in them. In horses or men, blood counts if they are hard pushed. Skulkers and white trash will straggle, desert, get away and survive. War takes the heaviest toll from the best and bravest, always.

"And as for hoodwinking her into giving us bacon, hominy, pone and 'lasses —that was the least of the breakfast. While you were playing with the children she told me the news of the countryside. Didn't know I am the blackguard of the family, but said—"

"'Pears like youah family is some punkins."

"In a way, it is your family too. My grandmother was a Lanister. You and I are related, Rand."

"Don't youah people know about you bein' in Washington?"

"They wouldn't think it possible. Not even though I am not supposed to be a Silliker—or even a gentleman—any longer."

"Why not?"

"You forget I cheated at cards."

"But you didn't!"

"They believe I did. That was a long time ago. I am not forgiven, but they will be glad to see me—in gray!" The captain nodded somberly. "And I am going to run the risk of seeing just how they will act toward me, because if there is anybody outside of high army circles who knows the plans and movements of Johnston's army, Senator Silliker will."

"And you are goin' to—from youah own father?"

The captain's thin face flushed. He suddenly found a spur strap loose and took his foot from the stirrup, bending to adjust it. He did not do much with the spur strap except get his own temper in hand.

"Lanister," he said severely, "one thing you must learn. This is war! The fate of armies is in the balance. The Union Army—our Army—marched from Washington to fight Beauregard at Manassas. Over there at Winchester is another Confederate army, and another Union Army to watch it—to keep it from getting away and combining with Beauregard. If the two armies do effect a junction, McDowell will be defeated. To prevent that defeat by getting information that will help McDowell, you and I must do anything possible! If your scruples are more sensitive than mine, here and now is the time for you to say so and turn back!"

"Me go and leave you in the lurch?

Hell, no! But I'd rather ride up and hog-tie old Beauregard hisself and make him talk than play the spy on my own father."

"Damn you, sir! Shut up!" said the captain, furious.

The next instant he was ashamed of his loss of temper. He thrust out his hand.

"I'm sorry, boy."

Rand took his hand and looked sheepish for a moment, then faced the captain with a boyish smile which eased the tension between them.

They rode on in silence, each busy with his mount and his thoughts.

THE life of the countryside had begun to flow into the roads. Creaking wagons, filled with supplies generously bought in the new Confederate script by quartermasters, were dragged by sad little mules that looked as if they knew all about war and what fools men were for making it. Teamsters lolled sluggishly on the backs of the near-wheelers. A small drove of cattle was driven along in a cloud of dust by two small boys, barefoot and bareback on bony old horses whose sides were scarred with plough traces. They rode as proudly as cavalrymen toward the army; and, staring backward, tried to copy the riding posture of Rand and the captain.

Ragged field laborers stirred lazily in the cornfields of the bottom lands, silent as mutes. There was the *chuff-chuff* of hoes and the metallic click of iron on pebbles in the rich loam. Birds twittered.

Peace, like a benediction, seemed to lie on the land.

An overseer pushed his horse to the rail fence and called—

"Mo'nin', sogers! Any news? Ah'll bet them damned Yanks won't fight! They'll git licked sho, an' they knows thet. Wo'd I fight a fellah Ah knows co'd lick the tahr outa me? No, suh! An' them Yanks is jus' tryin' fo' to scahr we uns!"

CHAPTER XII

REUNION IN VIRGINIA

ABOUT noon they rode through a thick wood and drew rein at a double gateway. The gateway was pillared on each side by a square column of red brick with weather-bleached balls on top. The double gates were of rusted iron and fastened back. The top hinge of one had been pulled loose from the pillar, and the other also sagged. Just inside the gate was a small cottage, a few times larger than a sentry box, but not many, with a diminutive portico and two columns, now weather-faded and askew. The glass of the front windows of the cottage had been shattered.

Except for the wheel marks in the roadway and the look of the dusty ivy where it had been clipped and pinched when it ran its feelers into the road, this looked like the entrance to a deserted plantation. The gatekeeper's lodge had not been used in years. The land within the gate was covered with a thick growth of pine.

"Home again!" said Captain Silliker, looking all about.

Rand was disappointed. Senator Silliker was supposed to be a great man. The Lanister plantation in Louisiana was a well kept garden, and Rand had expected something magnificent of the Silliker place. The captain may have read the look on Rand's face. Anyhow, with a sweep of his hand, he said:

"The Sillikers cleared this land before Washington was born. Certainly before he was President. Used it up, raising tobacco. Didn't understand about fertilizer, didn't have guano. Cleared other land. Let this go. Niggers and tobacco would impoverish Eden."

"You against slavery?"

The captain gave him a look, half reproachful and reserved. He turned in the saddle, looking away, but remarked:

"It's all right for niggers. But it's hell on the whites."

"What yo' mean?"

The captain moved his horse with a slight pressure of his knee.

"Boy, the man that uses free labor has the best of it. Less worry, more profit. If your free laborer sickens and dies, get another. You haven't lost a thousand dollars. Will a nigger work hard? He will not! He knows you can't discharge him. He knows too, if yours is an old family, you can't—or certainly won't—whip him. Sell him, yes. At a loss. And if he doesn't like his new master, he takes to the swamps.

"The cotton and cane States perhaps do make a profit out of niggers, but only because they hire Irishmen to do all the heavy, hard work! They could make a bigger profit out of free labor, as factories do in the North. In Virginia, the only people that make money out of niggers are the men who breed them for the cotton States; and such persons are, of course, nobody.

"Besides, look what slavery does to our poor whites. They are too proud to do nigger work, and can't get much of any other kind. So they grow shiftless, live in wretched cabins, stick a few pumpkin seeds in the ground, shoot a wild hog now and then and drink bad whisky. The only way slavery can be profitable is if the slaves are so cheap you can work them to death, or crucify them as object lessons if they won't work. As the Romans did. Never at a thousand dollars a head!"

"Shucks. Then why don't folks turn 'em loose?"

"To run wild and grow lawless? Anyhow, slavery has become a part of our social order. The South shrinks from changes of any kind, especially violent changes. Doesn't understand economics. Hasn't Yankee inventiveness or energy, and doesn't want them. See that broken gate? Boys broke that twenty years ago, swinging on it. My father ordered the nigger blacksmith to fix it. There you are."

"My gosh! My father tell a man to fix a corral gate, he'd skin 'im alive if he didn't!"

"Not if the unskinned man was worth a thousand dollars! Of course," the captain added, "I can't swear it wasn't fixed since then and broken again. But not while I was home. And I'm sure it has been broken so long now that the Senator would not think of having it fixed. It has become a part of the social order. Neighbors would suspect that Senator Silliker's affairs were probably in a bad way because he was putting on dog, sprucing up, trying to change appearances! That sounds a little exaggerated, but the idea isn't. Come along. We'll either get hanged to a tall limb, or get a mighty fine dinner!"

THE road led uphill, winding slightly. When they were out of the pine forest that in Washington's day had been a tobacco field, they came to a large white house, with a vast pillared portico, on a knoll surrounded and overshadowed by spreading oaks. A few Negroes lolled in the shade at the far side of the house and eyed the horsemen.

The captain called for some one to come for the horses, and they scarcely stirred except to push at a young boy. He came up, grinning; and, hopeful that flattery would get a dime tossed to him, said:

"Howdy, mass'. Howdy! Yo' mighty fine lookin' sogers. Yassa! All de folks am gone to de Ahrmy fo' tewday. Dat am a fac', yassa!"

The captain began to ask questions, and the boy's eyes grew wider and wider as he saw that he was talking with a member of the family.

"Is you Mass' Joe? Fo' de Lord sake! Yo' is Mass' Joe! Hi, dar, dis am Massa Joe his bery self!"

The Negroes on the turf under the great oak stared as if suspicious of being tricked into getting so near the horses they would have to lead them away; but curiosity and an eagerness to be amazed caused them to shamble closer.

They were black fellows, well fed, with

glossy faces; spoiled Negroes, proud of being Silliker Negroes, and looked down on the Negroes of less important owners. Lazy and cunning, but loyal to the Sillikers and jealous of the Silliker name and fame.

Southerners objected to the use of the word slavery. "Our peculiar institution" was their euphemism. "The vile word *slavery,*" said a polemic Southerner, "has been fastened upon us by the exaggeration and conceit of Northern literature."

All through the South were two classes of slaves. One was the house servants; the other, field Negroes. In all the numerous accounts of Union soldiers escaping from prison, it is perhaps not recorded that a field Negro ever betrayed the Yankee, whom he readily fed and guided; or that a household servant ever failed to betray the fugitive Yankee.

Some Northern politicians during the war hoped for, planned for, urged and encouraged an uprising of the slaves; but the Negroes remained amazingly loyal to their masters, even when the masters were at the front and they were left under the supervision of women and girls. They might be impudent, grow lazier, or run away; but the few who did turn to loot, rape and massacre seem to have been led by renegade whites.

One thing is certain: The field Negroes were badly used, being treated precisely like two-legged animals. They wanted freedom, which they thought was a condition of perpetual and well-fed idleness; but they were not revengeful. The house servants seem to have regarded themselves as members of the owner's family, took the owner's name, were passionately loyal, for the most part wanted nothing to do with freedom, and hated Yankees.

Now an old Negro came up almost stealthily, peering closely. With primitive clairvoyance he saw the Silliker blood in the captain's lean, aristocratic face, and lunged forward.

"Lord bress me! It am Mass' Joe! Don' yo' 'member me, Mass' Joe? Don' yo' 'member that ol' no-'count niggah —don' yo' 'member ol' Stotle?"

"You are Aristotle?"

"Yassa! Yassa! I'se Stotle. He do 'member me! He'h yo' doggone lazy niggahs, you! Take dese he'h hosses tew de ba'hn. What fo' yo' stan' der lack yo' was sallyvated? Bress mah soul, it am Massa Joe come home!"

Rand and the captain went on to the portico.

"Looks like you was welcome," said Rand.

"Boy, if the Negroes love you, they want you home. They don't care what you've done, or been accused of doing." The captain put his hand on the nose of the iron lion's head by the door, rubbing it as if greeting an old pet. "Almost feel I ought to knock. I seem that much of a stranger."

The door opened into cavernous shadows, dim and funereal. They entered. The captain looked about, letting his eyes clear of sunlight, and gazed with awed affection at old familiar objects.

"Damn!" he said softly, standing near and gazing into a tall mirror. "I used to measure myself in this glass!"

They heard the shuffle of feet. A black girl, her startled eyes showing white, looked through a doorway.

"Who yo' all?" she demanded, not liking strangers with the bad manners to enter uninvited.

"I," said the captain, amused, "am Senator Silliker's eldest son; and this is my friend, who is also a relative of the Senator's!"

The girl looked as if the breath had been knocked from her; then she squeaked, turned, ran, and called as she ran:

"Nervah! Oh, Nervah! Yo' Massa Joe is he'h! Nervah!"

"Minerva!" The captain spoke as if awakened suddenly. He absently pitched hat and gloves at a chair. "I thought she was dead years ago!"

He smiled at Rand.

"My grandfather was a Greek scholar and had humor. An eavesdropper

would think this was Olympus."

A bowed Negress with a stick under her curved fingers came in slowly. She was wrinkled, black, gray haired, neat and clean. She gazed with uplifted old eyes as if at a vision and whimpered:

"Massa Joe! You done come home at las'!" She dropped the cane and ran toward him, tottering, arms outstretched.

The captain, momentarily embarrassed, tried affectionately to ward off her embrace. But she would not be denied the kiss of the grown baby she had nursed. She hugged him. His reserve gave way, and he hugged her. She kissed him, clutched him, peered at him and moaned happily—

"Thank de good God yo' has done come home!"

"This is my friend, Lieutenant Lanister."

"How de do, sah!" said the old Negress with cordial dignity. She had lived intimately for three score years under the Silliker rooftree and had, or thought she had, quality manners. "Youah sister, sah, sayed yo' looked lak a Lanister. But in all my bo'n days, sah, I neveh seen a blue-eyed Lanister, sah!"

Rand looked in blank amazement at the captain, who furtively tapped his own forehead, looking pityingly at the old nurse.

"Has you seen youah daddy yit, Mass' Joe?"

"No, Minerva. He is in good health, I hope." The captain's tone was pretty cool.

"Good healt'! Good healt'!" she scolded. "How can he be in good healt' wid all de trials an' tribulations dat am come 'pon his po' ol' head? Why, honey, dis he'h wahr ain' nuffin to what he's had to trouble 'im, not knowin' whar yo' was, Mass' Joe!"

"He invited me to go, and never return."

"See he'h, honey! Don't yo' go an' be ha'd on youah ol' daddy!" said the old darky sternly.

"Is he home?"

"Ain't nobody home 'cept Mass' Bob." She spoke the name with distaste. "An' nobody want see him, do dey, honey?"

"Why, what's wrong with Bob?"

"Lor'-lord! Don't yo' know?" She peered, blinking. "Don' yo' know how youah daddy won't let 'im starf like he ought?"

"Starve?"

"Mass' Joe, don' yo' know what done been happened?" Minerva's voice ascended shrilly. "Don't yo' know Mass' Bob fell off a hoss—de good Lord he done it a-purpose!—an' hurt hisself so bad he was lak fo' to die?"

"No. What do you mean? What are you talking about, Minerva?" The captain believed that her mind was not quite clear.

"Don' yo' know? Don't yo' know how, 'bout a yeah ago, Mass' Bob thought he was sho' dyin' an' he up an' told youah daddy it was him marked dem cards an' told one ob youah friends to 'xamine 'em! Why, honey, de good Lord done broke his back fo' to shake de truf right outa him! He can't waggle his laigs! No 'spect'ble folks won't go neah 'im. No, sah! He jes' set alone up dar—" She waved a hand overhead. "Yes, sah! Big fiel' niggah takes up his vittles, an' pokes 'im into bed, an' drags 'im out of a mo'nin'! Massa Joe, honey! Eveh one of us fam'ly servants would die, sah, befo' we'd lift a hand fo' to he'p him! Dat am de truf!"

The captain's hands were clenched. His face was as pale as if chalked. If ever the desire to do murder could look out of a man's eyes, that desire gleamed in the captain's. Yet his voice was under control as he turned to Rand.

"My half-brother! Thought, I suppose, there was no other way to be heir and head of the Sillikers. God, who knows all things, knows that never in the bitterness of wondering how the thing happened did I suspect him!" Then, cautiously, "See here, Minerva?"

"Yes, sah, honey!"

He peered into the wrinkled, feverish

face.

"This is true? It isn't just something you wished would happen? Something you've imagined?"

"Ob co'se it am true!" she said indignantly. "Yo' don't think youah ol' black mammy would lie to you. Yo' go right 'long up an' see fo' youahself, Massa Joe! Yes, sah! He am in de north room wid dat fiel' niggah. An' when yo' come down I'll hab dese lazy niggahs hab dinnah fo' you!"

"Come along, boy." The captain touched Rand's shoulder. "You are one of the family; and I'll want somebody near to keep me from choking the life out of him, if he is there!"

A BURLY, sullen Negro, in a badly fitting, cast-off black swallowtail coat and baggy trousers much too long for his short legs, opened the door and looked out, staring stupidly.

"Who is it, Sard? Who is it?" a petulant, eager voice within the room called.

Captain Silliker, his back rigid, walked in past the submissive Negro, who lumbered out of the way. Rand followed, curious but reluctant.

A thin, dark-eyed, pale young man sat in a wheel-chair by a window with a flimsy shawl over his legs, not for warmth but as if to hide their withered frailty from his own eyes. The window opened on the barnyard, with a twinkling gleam from the river below the house. An open book dropped unnoticed to the floor from the wheel-chair. The cripple stared, and terror crept into his look. He clutched the wheels of the chair as if to turn them and scurry across the room to try to hide in a corner.

"Joe? Joe!" he cried in astonishment, pleading.

Captain Silliker stopped and drew himself up. He looked at the man in the chair. A much younger man than himself, with sharp, clear features; handsome, except for the thin mouth and the frightened eyes.

"J-Joe, you don't know how I have suffered!"

Captain Silliker's jaws tightened.

"J-Joe, I m-made everything right for you! I—I might have kept still. But I wanted to m-make it right!"

The captain, not speaking, looked about the room.

"Oh, I would give my soul to be—be in a uniform like yours! Go out and be killed like a man! Joe, I suffer hell. Won't you say you forgive me, Joe?"

"Lord knows," said Captain Silliker, "I'd have given you the plantation. All I cared about was the Army."

"Joe, Joe! Just for telling how it happened, Joe, I have been ostracized like a leper. I didn't have to tell. I wanted your name to be cleared, Joe!"

"For fifteen years I have had to remember that everybody I cared about thought I was a blackleg gambler!"

"Forgive me, Joe! Joe, forgive me!"

"By God, no! Never! But I never yet struck a wounded enemy." He turned on the Negro. "You!"

"Yuzza."

"Clean up this room. Make that bed. Open these windows and let fresh air in."

"Yuzza, boss. Yuzza."

"And, damn you, keep it clean!"

"Yuzza. Yuzza."

"Oh, thank you, Joe!" The petulant voice whimpered in flattering gratitude. "God bless you! He won't do anything I ask. And no one cares. No one comes near me. This is living death. And all because I wanted to do the honorable thing toward you, Joe!"

Captain Silliker faced about and left the room. The stolid Negro closed the door, grunting submissively—

"Yuzza, yuzza, boss."

Far down the hall the captain pulled at Rand's arm, stopping him.

"You see what they think of him? If they learned I am a Yankee, they will think he is a hundred times better than I. Forgive him? I could forgive him everything except that he has made me a traitor to the South."

TO BE CONTINUED

ON THE DODGE

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Author of "A Fifteen-Cent Meal"

A SMALL man with a slight limp, and one shoulder considerably lower than the other, came into the Cumberland Café on the Gap Road over the Blue Ridge. The lunch counter spread across the back of the room, and there were four tables along the edge of the large hardwood floor, which was roomy enough for four sets in a square dance. The tables served for dinner or cards, according to the hour.

Quite a crowd of hill-billies sat on benches around the walls. Two games were going at the tables, for it was late suppertime. The newcomer, glancing around, saw that he was instantly under the scrutiny of the players and others. All strangers who came to the Cumberland Café were under suspicion, for no one knew when a spy, reward-seeker or detective would appear.

"I'm hungry," the man said to the waitress, his voice gentle. "'Most anything'll do if it's strong and filling."

"We're here to feed folks," the young woman said. "We c'n feed you plenty—baby beef, roast pork, chicken potpie, all hot and ready. I can start you off on a soup."

"A bowl of soup, roast pork and potpie," the man said.

Two of the loungers came to sit at the end of the counter. The stranger glanced at them. At a scuffle at one of the tables, he looked over his shoulder, gave a slight shiver and moved around to a seat at the end of the counter with his back to the corner.

The soup, made from mountain beef, was good, and the man ate with gusto. He ate a full plate each of pork and potpie, drank his coffee black and topped off with wild-apple pie. The proprietor entered from the kitchen and came along behind the counter, looking at the newcomer.

"Can I get a place to sleep?" the stranger asked.

"I reckon—a room upstairs," the café man said with hesitation. "Six bits, with breakfast in the morning."

"I'm glad," the man said. "I sure need it."

One of the poker players had to go to play for dancing with the mountain orchestra, of which he was the fiddler.

"Mebbe you'd like to sit in that game," the café man suggested to the

stranger, whose face lighted up eagerly.

"Sure would," he declared. "I like cards to settle my supper."

Accordingly he went to the table. He sat with his back to the wall and bought ten dollars' worth of chips, stacking them before him. The game looked friendly, with a twenty-five cent limit. The stranger had been invited at the suggestion of one of the players, a broad-backed, silk-shirted, well clothed Latin type of man. The other three players were a lank, pale-eyed, long-necked mountain man; a white-collared storekeeper; and a wide-hatted, thin-faced youngster who exaggerated his motions and whistled through his teeth.

The newcomer mentioned his name as Tom Jones. Then the young smarty said he was Hot Springs Colby. The merchant was Rumsey; the hill-billy Shotgun Gillam; the silk-shirted one was Mulando. Hot Springs was shuffling. He slapped the cards at Jones, his manner cocky.

"Cut?" he inquired.

Jones gave the cards a quick double flip with long, supple hands. On the first play Jones took in three dollars' worth of chips, and he kept on taking in the chips, but always glancing around first to see whether it was all right according to the showdowns.

The other players grew restive. The limit was presently raised, for the local players wanted a chance to recoup their losses. Whether it was a quarter ante or five dollars, it seemed to make no difference to Jones. His only peculiarity in playing was the fact that when he pressed his betting it was on the deals of his antagonists. He merely broke even on his own.

Jones was weary. After an hour or two he was nodding, as if partly asleep. In one interval he actually slumped. Then the silk-shirted Mulando, who had invited Jones to play, suddenly snarled:

"Mebbe you'd like to quit, eh? No, you don't work us so."

Jones gave no sign that he had heard, and Hot Springs Colby gave him a quick punch in the arm. Jones sprang half out of his chair, startled as he glanced around and shook the cobwebs out of his eyes. He looked at his hand, leaned back to survey his stacks of poker chips and the even more significant paper currency for which the chips served as weights against the drafts caused by the swirling of the couples in the square dance figures.

"You're damned lucky, fellow!" the Italian remarked.

"Not always." Jones shook his head. "I've had my hard luck too. I got to get some sleep. Three more hands and I'm through."

"We don't quit playing winners before midnight in this country," Hot Springs declared tartly.

"You don't draw out on us. Play your lucky string through," the hill-billy insisted coldly. "We want a whack back at that stack."

The stranger made no comment on that. The cards were dealt around quickly, bids came fast and the long minute hand crossed the midnight figures on the wall clock. The hour hand lagged behind, and presently it was five minutes after midnight—but in the middle of a jackpot. The stranger raised. He shoved money into the heap with abandon, but the Italian met his challenge and lost with three jacks to three aces—and this was on the loser's own deal.

"Cash these chips," the stranger said, a wistful tone covering his abrupt request.

"No." The Italian, who had the bank, shook his head. "You don't run out with that money."

"I'll match cards even for the whole damned pile then," the winner said. "That be all right?"

The bet stumped the objector. He sat glowering, puzzled for an evasion.

"No, we play for sport." Mulando shook his head. "We play poker."

The stranger squinted his eyes, which were bloodshot, swollen and heavy with weariness.

"I'll play you tomorrow," he offered. "Hell, men, I'm dead tired! I need the sleep, get me?"

The four glanced at one another. They had lost something more than a thousand dollars among them. More than money, however, was involved. They turned cold eyes on the winner. All of them were much larger men and they were pictures of health, the rambunctious, overbearing, competent health of the Appalachian mountains—full-blooded, well fed, self-satisfied.

SHRINKING in his chair, the winner huddled lower as he worked the paper money into a thick, orderly brick. He counted his chips. They came to four hundred and sixty dollars. With what seemed to be a pleading gesture he shoved his stacks toward Mulando, who glowered at the stuff to be exchanged for good money, of which he had already paid out only too much.

"All right, we play tomorrow then." Mulando snarled and in cashing up tried to gyp the winner out of twenty dollars.

When Jones started past young Hot Springs, the lad shoved his foot between the older man's feet, so that he pitched forward and tripped; but in squirming around Jones somehow caught the trickster as if to save himself and threw him violently to the floor. The fall was so heavy that for several minutes Hot Springs Colby lay stunned. Jones backed against the wall and stood watchful while three or four of the girls, with loud cries, brought cold water to revive the victim.

Jones edged along the wall to the rear. The proprietor glowered at him, but led the way upstairs to the room. There he demanded the price in advance, which was, considering the circumstances, an insult.

"How'd you get here?" he added when the money was in his hand.

"Ridin' a horse," the patron answered. "It's in the stable."

Sitting in the bedroom, Jones heard the voices downstairs. The stovepipe came up through his room, and around it through the ventilator holes the talk about Jones was clearly audible.

"A sneak, that's what he is," some one said.

"How come he win on *my* deal?" Mulando demanded hotly.

"You boys leave him alone," a young woman's voice said. "He's a little fellow; shame on you for nagging him!"

"Tomorrow he loses back or it wasn't play for keeps," the young smart aleck jeered as if in fun, but the listener recognized in the voice a determination that was not mockery.

Jones knew what to expect.

Quickly he spread his clothes down, everything exactly ready at the head of his bed, including two saddle-pokes connected by a loop to go over a horn. He tried the doorknob, balanced on it the tin cover of a salad dressing jar he took from his locker. If any one turned that knob the tin would drop into the wash bowl placed on the floor beneath and awaken him.

Under his shirt was a double shoulder holster carrying two guns, one under each arm. Loops in the leather held a hundred bright shells, and around his waist was a money-belt into which with other money he negligently tucked his night's winnings. After a quick glance around the room he blew out the light in the lamp and raised the window sash to look into the road out front where the yellow light from the café windows lay pale upon the smooth pike and revealed the woods just across the way. The side window of the room looked out on a sloping balcony roof toward the stable thirty yards distant where he had hung his own saddle. He had noted the front and rear entrances, and the downgrade slope of the clearing behind the livery barn.

When he went to bed Jones knew details of the place which perhaps few regular patrons had ever noticed. He was tired, a stranger and anxious not to attract attention. But he had gained

more than money from the men who had taken him into their game not only to try for his money, but to size him up, prying into his affairs, and try to take advantage of the odds in their favor. Understanding their game, it made him chuckle inside. They were nothing but petty larceny scamps. They couldn't even play poker without squealing when they blistered their own fingers.

So, sleeping like a cat, he knew what was going on, hardly missing a tune as the fiddle, banjo, French harp and accordion ran through the repertoire for a Blue Ridge dance. They were serving liquor now that he was out of the way. He was thirsty, but he wasn't running risks asking for any of the stuff. The crowd was suspicious enough of his identity without his giving them any ideas that he wasn't minding his own business.

Even in his dreams Jones laughed at being mistaken for a Federal, suspected of being a Pinkerton man or of seeking reward money. Probably in five counties around all those "rewarded" would have been worth less to a captor than he himself.

The Cumberland Café was all right with him. The Blue Ridge and Big Smokies were all according to his needs. He couldn't say he liked the hardwood, the frequent rains, or the living conditions, but a stranger on horseback did not seem too conspicuous—and it was two thousand miles from where people didn't make the mistake of thinking Tom Jones was a revenuer.

TOWARD noon somebody rapped on the bedroom door. Jones said—

"O.K."

In two minutes he was washed, and in a few seconds more he was buckled and buttoned up. His feet didn't look it, with his trousers outside, but he wore high laced boots that cost forty dollars, light and thick-soled and good for walking—or running, if need be.

Dinner was ready. It was good. Hot bread, a big bowl of gravy, a roast wild turkey, sage dressing. Sage? Jones whiffed that odor with a shudder of homesickness, seeing in his thoughts ten thousand square miles of sage with alkali in the Big Horn Basin, and sage down in east Utah and other places, in all of which Tom Jones was at home; and if and when at home in greater danger than these hill-billies ever could know or imagine. He realized that they were welchers, that they'd shoot a man in the back if necessary to recover what they'd lost in a game wherein poker sense and recklessness beat their petty cheating.

Tom Jones sat at the end of the counter where he could see all the room. He ate heartily, his glance casually, as it seemed, watching every one. The girl with the fine voice, who had told the gang to leave him alone, was waiting on him; she was tall, dark and pretty. She gazed at him from under lowered lids, and each time she passed he met her eyes squarely. When he had finished eating he slipped a twenty-dollar gold piece under his coffee cup, undetected by the closely watching rascals along the counter. The girl gave no sign.

Jones looked around for the welchers at cards, but none of the four was in sight. At the stable he looked over his horse, gave the stable boy a dollar for extra corn and a rub-down for the handsome horse that wore no brand but obviously had been bred in old Kentucky. Somewhere over in the Blue Grass pasture a day's journey back there was bewilderment over the disappearance of that horse and the appearance, in its stead, of a tall man-mule that only Jones knew about.

"You ain't ridin' *out*, mister?" the boy asked shrewdly.

"Not now," was the answer. But when the boy was back in the stable shadows the stranger studied the woods across the road and went out the rear doorway into the back door of the café.

The afternoon waned. Two men in turn sat all the hours in the café watch-

ing Jones. No one would mistake them for detectives, not in a thousand years. The cheap skates had put them there for fear Tom Jones would run out on them, escape with their thousand-odd dollars, and so make them the laughing-stock in a land where their dignity was all they had to live on—dignity, venom and bushwhacking nerve.

Finally Jones realized that the other four poker players were waiting for dark, that then they would have more than cards up their sleeves. All Tom Jones wanted was half a chance; he never asked more than that. He moved about restlessly, walking along the café walls as other patrons came and went.

In the rear of the hallway one door led to the cellar and another opened into the kitchen, and there Jones at last met the tall, handsome waitress.

"They've got your number on a bullet," she whispered. "They think you're a detector, mister."

Tom Jones slipped her five double-eagles, and tears came to her eyes.

"You're good, stranger," she said, "but that's too much."

"Not for me." He shook his head. "Nobody else would have told me, and I'm cheap, giving so little. Say, what's your name?"

"Mary."

"Listen, Mary—that boy in the stable?"

"He likes me," she said simply.

"Here's his bit," Jones said abruptly. "I'm leaving. Have that horse—where'd it be best?"

"Across the brook along the path through the woods back of the stable yard," she answered. "Soon's it's dark I'll tend to that, sir."

AFTER supper an hour later the card game was resumed, and it was plain that the four squealers were just killing time, getting up their nerve. They had tried with obvious insistence and despicable intention to have Jones sit with his back to the dancing floor, where a stepper could stick a knife into his back. He laughed as he claimed his old seat with his back to the wall. The smart aleck, Hot Springs, however, traded with Mulando, who was left-handed, and that gave two men to one, each in a seat where he'd have the gun-swing on Jones. They showed their satisfaction at their advantage—as if Jones would overlook it.

In an hour the reckless playing of the four had given Tom Jones another thousand dollars of their money, and they were squandering their plays. They gave themselves away, over and over again, indicating that they were going to get it back. This, as if even the man they thought Jones to be would have overlooked their play.

Then Hot Springs, watching Jones shuffle, suddenly said—

"Damn you, gimme that deck."

Without a word Tom Jones slapped it before the smart aleck, who was astonished and at a loss at that cheerful compliance. Jones was straight-backed, smiling through his black mustache and gentler than ever.

"Go through it," Jones suggested. "Do your stuff, boy."

Hot Springs, thus called, picked up the cards and spread them out, face up. Mulando had stacked them and handed them to Jones. And, sure enough, the four aces had been crimped so that they stood arched on the table.

"Look!" The Smart Alec indicated the cards, bent for recognition by look or feel.

On the instant Tom Jones flashed his hands across his chest, and when he flung his arms apart two guns, each of which weighed nearly three pounds, struck against the defenceless faces of Mulando and the youth. The two went over backward, limp from those terrible blows across their eyes.

Jones swept all the cash in sight into his pocket, having holstered one of the guns—took not only his own winnings but those of the four rascals too. Across the floor behind the counter was

a red-haired little man who started to throw up a shotgun where it had been planted, but Jones slapped a shot that way as the double-barrel cleared the counter; and the would-be killer, hit in the brisket, dropped out of sight.

The spectators surged back, raising their hands as Tom Jones, not even obliged to speak, drove everybody to the walls. When he glanced at the hill-billy and Rumsey he said:

"I said I'd play tonight. Satisfied?"

"Oh, yes—yes, sir-r!" Rumsey gasped.

A quid of tobacco rolled out of Gillam's cavernous open jaws and rolled down his shirt bosom. At that Tom Jones laughed a loud, deep, genuine guffaw that nobody ever forgot.

Jones slithered to the front door and stood beside it an instant, surveying the crowd.

"Don't anybody move for ten minutes," he said, nodding toward the clock. "Watch them hands good."

He stepped outside. Two minutes later the lank hill-billy sprang on the run toward the counter after the shotgun. At his third jump a shot came from the dark outside, and the impatient mountain man pitched forward and slid along the waxed dancing floor. No one moved for half an hour, all staring at the inert figure and listening to the groans of the man lying behind the counter.

Tom Jones reached the brook, and as he came to his horse a low voice hailed him from beside the road. It was the girl.

"Can you give me a lift?" she said. "I heard the shots and I think I'd better leave now. I live outside, at Whitewater Ford, if you'll carry me."

"Sure will, and that's on my way," he said, swinging her up behind him and racing off along the roadway, the hoof-beats echoing in the night.

She told him of short-cuts and where to circle, bedeviling pursuit, if any, and at the false dawn they came to Whitewater. He stopped his horse at the stepping block beside a fence at a little cabin clearing.

"I could take you with me," he suggested, "only you—"

"No, suh." She shook her head. "I couldn't go. Those fellers at the Cumberland ain't no good. They're mean, trifling, no 'count. An' 'course you're bad too. I noticed your picture on the post office blackboard. I'd neveh traitor you'uns for blood money, suh. I always look at those pictures on the reward notices, for men, stray mules and stolen horses. I had one already, telling about a mule impounded and a thoroughbred hunter missin' from the same pasture. I reckon you'd be int'rested."

She handed him the folded slips and, stepping over the fence, hurried toward the cabin in the gray, drizzling dawn.

"Thank you kindly," he called after her, but she shrugged her shoulders as he rode on his way, not seeing her face again.

ALONG the fence he came to the open timber, where he rode for a time slowly, reading the reward notices: $16,500 for himself, and $50 for information about the horse he was riding. That made him laugh, for it was a good joke to tell the boys when they met again at their rendezvous.

Leaning forward, he started the horse running down the ridge slope. Suddenly he heard a gun being cocked. With a glance over his shoulder he saw a man, not much more than a boy, rising from behind a fallen treetrunk up the mountain slope.

"Halt—halt or I'll shoot!" the youngster shouted.

Tom Jones leaned forward and slapped the horse into a gallop.

Good to his word, the boy shot. The bullet hit Jones in his shoulder, which was already much too low, and the blow and shock threw him clear of the saddle. He fell, rolling to the ground, and darted to his feet down into the laurel brush, nerved against other bullets which he expected would follow. Instead of shots, though, he heard a shrill, quick whistle

and saw the horse swerve and circle back, answering that summons.

Stumbling, staggering, stooping low, Tom Jones kept on his way. He was presently in the thickets. He stopped to plug the holes in and out of his shoulder—a sore wound, but not so bad as the .45-90 that had lowered that side in the past. Just a .32-20, he judged.

As he sat, catching his breath and nursing his bandaged shoulder, he read the reward notices again. On the back of the one for the horse he found written:

> Dear Mary:
>
> Somebody swapped my horse; you know, the one I come to see you riding. Maybe this feller will ride your way on Skip, which is worth six mules like he left behind. It's the direct road—telephone if he comes. —JIM.

The MIRACLES of MOSES

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

AS IN our civilized day of skyscrapers and submarines people are apt to deny almost anything, even the existence of our Lord Jesus Christ, because tradition has dimmed His glorious deeds in a shroud of mystery, I consider it opportune to say a few words about the miracles of Moses, which frequently have been the target of disbelief.

In 1917 when I was with the Turkish army on the Sinai Peninsula—with Lord Allenby's cavalry pursuing us—I decided to seize the opportunity to read and seek the meaning of the memorable exodus of the Chosen People from Egypt to the Holy Land.

They traveled a roundabout way, since the Philistines would have intercepted their march through Gaza, cutting them off from the only caravan route which at that time led from Egypt to Palestine along the coast of the Mediterranean. This motive was undoubtedly very powerful in Moses's decision to lead the exodus by way of the Sinai Peninsula toward Eastjordanland. That was a region in which he knew every goat trail and waterhole, since he had spent many years there herding Jethro's flock of goats and sheep.

Because he knew the utter sterility of those wastelands Moses advised the Chosen People to provide themselves with everything they could lay hands on before their departure. Moses was a wise old man. For one thing, he never forgot his calendar. He knew exactly when the south wind would drive the waters of the Red Sea inland along the Ismaeli depression (it still happens) and he timed his departure accordingly, thus covering his retreat for several hours.

Moses was fortunate in that the Pharaoh and his retainers utterly lost their heads during their reckless rush to prevent the escape of those thousands of skilled laborers—who had been building their giant monuments for practically no remuneration whatsoever—and forgot all they knew about the treacherous habits of the Red Sea, with the result that they got drowned like rats in the rising tidewaters. If the Pharaoh and his men had followed a certain short-cut—which we used to advantage during the World War—in order to cut off the Chosen People's re-

treat, they would not have perished to a man and they might have kept the Jews working at low wages on the Pyramids.

The miracles of Moses are admirable as the fruits of his great foresight and his vast experience as an old-timer. How he made the water spring from a barren rock can easily be explained. It is a well known fact that the moisture, precipitated at night through the agency of the mist and low clouds on the crests of the bare ridges which criss-cross the Sinai Peninsula like a skeleton, flows in the form of underground seepage beneath the sandy bottom of the dry gulches, or *wadis*. Often a rocky ledge causes the water to gather into subterranean cisterns, which are known only to the Bedouins, who keep them cleverly camouflaged.

Since Moses had followed the life of a tribesman himself, driving his father-in-law's herds for four decades from one spring to another, he naturally knew every waterhole and subterranean cistern from Ismaeli to Akabah and the Eastjordanland. It is not unreasonable, therefore, that he formulated during that period of his life his plan to lead the Chosen People from Egypt to the Holy Land along that roundabout route, and advised the Jews to carry their larders with them in the shape of camels, sheep and goats. Cattle require too much water in the desert and do not provide wool for clothing.

The Jews passed most of the famous forty years in oases where water was plentiful, so as to restock their herds which offered them their only means of subsistence.

The miracle of how Moses caused water to flow from a rock can be reconstructed in the following way: When the vanguard of the receding Jews arrived with empty waterbags at their first camping place and failed to locate the spring which Moses had told them they would find there, they commenced to murmur, until the "old man" arrived and, pointing with his staff at a canyon wall, ordered them to remove "that" stone. Lo and behold! Behind the stone a black gap appeared. Then a big splash was heard when a rock struck the surface of the first of the many subterranean cisterns to which Moses was to direct the Chosen People during their forty years of wandering across those dreary wastelands.

The plague of snakes. which later decimated the Jews, undoubtedly took place in the dusty and scrub-covered plains of the Sirhan district, east of Akabah, which are still infested with numerous varieties of poisonous snakes and are carefully shunned by the Bedouins for that reason. The Jews presumably ran into that plain by mistake. They managed to escape from it thanks to a wooden pole with a stick tied to its upper end, to which a dead snake was attached—the miraculous cross with a bronze snake—indicating the direction the pilgrims had to follow to get out of that accursed spot.

I shall not try to explain the miracle of the manna, for the secret of it has leaked out long ago. But the miracle of the grouse, which came when the Jews tired of the insipid manna and began clamoring for the fleshpots of Egypt, is easily explained by the migrating grouse which today—as forty centuries ago—still visit twice a year the Sinai Peninsula, flying very low for reasons which they have never divulged. Moses knew that, and he told the Jews to draw nets "Arab fashion" across the canyons and gulches, into which the grouse would fly by the thousands.

Thus good old Baba-Musa, as the Mohammedans call him, led his host of tenderfeet from one waterhole to another and from one miracle to the next, until they finally reached the Holy Land. There they built their marvelous religious-political commonwealth, based mainly on the principles of monotheism which their forefathers, symbolized by the Patriarch Abraham, had brought from Chaldea and Babylon to the shores of the Jordan in the night of time.

TEA *in* SWAT

By PERRY ADAMS

Author of "The Rifle"

LIKE every Cooper in the British army, he was nicknamed Nudger; unlike all others—and there are many—he will go down in history as Cooper of Swat.

Private Cooper of the Midland Regiment took his nickname as a matter of course. And since coming events, in his case, cast no shadow, neither did the fact that he was to be distinguished above other Coopers disturb him, for he had no faintest inkling of it.

Indeed, since joining his unit in Peshawar, the only distinction earned by young Mr. Cooper was the doubtful one of being called a scrounger—a low person who avoids every form of manual labor at the expense of his mates. Nudger could scent a fatigue party in the offing with all the delicate sensitiveness of a hunted stag. Like the stag, he possessed a genius for being absent from the expected spot at the critical moment.

So his mates called him a scrounger—but that wasn't all. It is not an unnatural mental process, once a scrounger is branded, to defame him further. If a man runs away from work, mightn't he run away from danger too? There were those in Nudger's company who were harshly outspoken on this phase of the matter.

To avoid work was a fixed policy with Nudger, and accounted more than any other thing for his enlistment in his native Manchester. For he had determined to escape a dreary and endless round of household chores, which daily preceded and succeeded long hours spent in a local cotton mill.

As to the degree of his spirit martial, there was little about his former life calculated to instill and foster it. He was rather slightly built, with a thin, pointed face, relieved by unexpectedly large brown eyes which seemed somehow to have been included as an afterthought, so little did they match the rest of his features. The least bit nearsighted, he habitually wore a bewildered, puzzled look; "like a bloomin' startled owl", as somebody said.

As a draftie coming to a hard-boiled regiment long established on the frontier, he had had, with members of his company, the usual small, inconclusive battles of adjustment. In these he had been willing to come off second best—to let these minor unpleasantnesses die down without forcing issues. Not physical fear, he had assured himself, but merely a desire to sidestep trouble as he did work, explained his passive attitude. If they liked, to that extent he was yellow.

But he recalled a remark made only the day before by a man in his bungalow —Jenkins, who had the bed next to him.

"Nudger," Jenkins had said, because he wouldn't stand up for his obvious rights, "Nudger, you ain't got the guts of a louse!"

And Jenkins had meant it.

So apparently people believed there was a good deal more than the faint streak of saffron which Nudger himself was willing to concede. This was the worst of it: He was not sure whether the allegation was justified, since he had no past experience—no real experience—whereby to estimate his bravery, or lack of bravery.

Thus oppressed, Nudger, with fixed bayonet, marched along with a detail of the Midlands, on their way to relieve the guard at an entrance to Peshawar City. Presently the objective was reached—a guardhouse hard by the Kabuli Gate.

Still brooding over his potential valor, Nudger automatically went through the ceremony of changing the guard. He had drawn second relief and had just racked his rifle and thrown equipment, tunic and topee on one of the iron bedsteads in the guardhouse, when it occurred to him that he had been warned to remove certain minute spots on the rifle and to pull it through.

He retrieved his rifle from the rack and went back to the bed with it. Placing the muzzle on his boot, he opened the butt trap and removed his oil rag and pull-through.

"I say, Nudger," warned Jenkins, who had taken the bed next to his, "if you're goin' to play with that thing, how about unloadin' it first?"

In his abstraction, Nudger had forgotten the live cartridges in the magazine. Now, in a Lee-Enfield, once a clip of cartridges has been pressed into the magazine, by far the easiest way to remove them is to pump them out with the bolt. For if the magazine is withdrawn, often the top cartridge jams in the mechanism, half in the boltway and half in the magazine.

So Nudger had begun to work his bolt, when there came a cry from the sentry outside.

"Guard—stand to!"

Nudger paused, his task incomplete.

"'Urry up, you blighters," said the anxious corporal, who had stuck his head out to see the reason for the warning, "there's a staff car comin' down the road at a good clip."

In the First Division a guard which doesn't pay proper compliments to red tabs, even in a fast moving car, is apt to acquire trouble in less than no time at all.

Nudger hastily donned tunic and equipment and grabbed his rifle just as the sentry called—

"Guard, turn out!"

It was all over in less than a minute, and the men were back in the guardhouse.

"Trouble with Peshawar is there's too blinkin' many officers," grumbled Nudger, resuming his cleaning.

He held the rifle in the hollow of his left arm and dabbed at it with the oil rag. The muzzle pointed in the general direction of the half open door.

Nudger noticed that in his hurry he had rushed out with the bolt in the cocked position. To release it he pulled the trigger. There was a roar—deafening in the small stone building—and the rifle sprang almost out of his arms.

"Blime!" he whispered in an awed voice. "'Ow could that 'ave 'appened?"

Too late, he remembered what he had

been doing when interrupted by the call to stand to.

Again the sentry was calling—

"Corporal—quick, a man's been shot!"

For Nudger the first faint shadow of coming events had been cast.

AT ABOUT the same time that the Midlands left barracks for guard duty at the Kabuli Gate two men walked along the same road, possibly ten minutes behind the detail. One, Mian Gul, wore the khaki of a Pathan regiment. The other, not a soldier, was Sayid Sher Shah, his right hand man and best friend.

Mian Gul was the scion of a once great house; he had served obscurely as a sepoy both to cloak his real reason for being in Peshawar and to gain the requisite military knowledge for his purpose.

Since his illustrious ancestor, Abdul Ghafur, had lent historic dignity to the title of Akhund, or religious leader, of the Swati people, the office and the power had slipped away through the inefficiency of his successors until now the country was split up among a group of ignorant mollahs.

Like Mohammed, perhaps, Mian Gul had had a vision of grandeur. At any rate, he had spent several years plotting in Peshawar bazaar for the coup which would reinstate him as the hereditary leader of his people.

His term of service in the Indian army would now be over within a few weeks. Recently he had converted the remains of the family fortune into cash and, through religious sympathizers in the bazaar, had managed to buy a miscellany of rifles and ammunition sufficient to arm about two thousand of his loyal adherents for the impending struggle against the mollahs.

Only one problem remained: how to get his purchases into Swat without attracting attention. At last he had heard of a group in the bazaar which might, for a consideration, be induced to help him. In fact, he and Sayid Sher Shah were now on their way to the bazaar to confer with these people.

As the two Swatis neared the Kabuli Gate a staff car whirled by, powdering them with dust.

Sayid Sher Shah shot a glance of hatred after the car.

"Thanks be to Allah, your period of waiting is nearly ended," he said. "Then there will be no more eating the dirt of these Unbelievers!"

Mian Gul said nothing. His mind was filled with his great project. They were now almost directly opposite the guardhouse.

"Knowing how necessary it is for us to get these rifles into Swat," went on Sayid Sher Shah, "the price they will demand will—"

His words were cut short by a shot, very near.

Mian Gul looked toward the guardhouse, but obviously it was not the sentry who had fired. Mian Gul turned quickly to make some remark to his companion, only to see him falling to the ground. He clutched at the drooping figure, but it evaded his grasp. Quickly he lifted his fallen friend in his arms and stepped off the road, where he knelt down, supporting the head and shoulders on his knee.

"Tell me, tell me what happened!" he asked, dazed by the suddenness of it.

His friend made no response.

The British guard rushed out. They carried the man into the guardhouse, where a hurried examination revealed that he must have died instantly, shot cleanly through the heart.

Mian Gul glared up at the ring of anxious British faces.

"Dogs!" he said, in a tense voice. "You did it on purpose!"

The corporal of the guard, who understood Pushtu, saw that this sepoy was of a Pathan regiment whose hockey team, the day before, had beaten the Midlands in the All-India Tournament. If there was any doubt of the sepoy's meaning his next words dispelled it.

"English sportsmen!" he sneered. "I

suppose this is revenge for our victory over you. You have killed my best friend! Which one of you did this thing? Tell me, if you dare."

Then, impatient of the pause that followed, he asked in English—

"Who shoot?"

The unfortunate Nudger betrayed himself by hanging his head.

Mian Gul wore belt and sidearms. Without warning he drew his bayonet and flew at Nudger. In the nick of time the corporal caught his upraised hand, while others wrenched the bayonet from him and dragged him aside. Mian Gul looked murderously at Nudger and lapsed into Pushtu.

"This is but the beginning," he said. "From now on you will have me to deal with!"

" 'E wants your blood, sure enough," said the corporal to Nudger. "You stay where you are. You, Jenkins and Plank, lock up this Pathan till 'e cools off. I'm goin' to telephone the regiment for instructions."

Which he did.

A COURT-MARTIAL reprimanded Nudger for gross carelessness and post-dated by a full year his time of eligibility for good-conduct pay. Under the circumstances, the manslaughter charge was dropped. The incident was particularly unfortunate both because the rumor spread in the bazaar that the shooting had a direct connection with the outcome of the hockey game and because of Mian Gul's religious influence among a large group of Peshawar Mohammedans.

But nothing further happened and within the month Nudger was relieved to hear that Mian Gul had received his discharge from the service and had disappeared.

The men in Nudger's bungalow heard the news, too.

"You better get permission to sleep with a loaded rifle beside you," said the irrepressible Jenkins. "That Swati's likely to show up some dark night and cut your 'eart out."

"Aw, what would Nudger want with a loaded rifle?" asked the man opposite. " 'E wouldn't know what to do with it, any 'ow."

"If they give 'im 'is rifle I'm puttin' in for a transfer," said Plank. "You shouldn't put such ideas in 'is 'ead, Jenkins; it ain't safe."

"That's true, too," chimed in another. "Look what 'e done without 'arf tryin'. No tellin' what 'e might do if 'e took it serious."

An amused lance corporal took up the refrain—

"That's the only way Nudger'd ever kill any one—accidental!"

"Aw, give over, can't yer?" growled Nudger, who had been more than ever the target of his mates since the affair at the Kabuli Gate.

Soon it was reported that matters were not as they should be in the valley of Swat. Mian Gul had succeeded, apparently, in running in his rifles and ammunition. The chant in Nudger's bungalow now changed.

"They say," said Jenkins, as the men lay on their beds one hot afternoon, "that the Midlands'll go up to Swat to quiet things down. That'll be fine for you, Nudger boy! This Mian Gul pal o' yours is the whole works up there."

"Aw, they'll leave Nudger be'ind with the depot," yawned a sleepy voice far down the bungalow.

"That don't seem like justice to me, leavin' 'im be'ind," said Plank. "Wasn't it Nudger started all this trouble?"

"Yus," said Jenkins, " 'e started it. But 'e couldn't finish it—that nor nothin' else."

There was more of it, until one by one the men succumbed to the heat of the afternoon and fell asleep.

Hands behind his head, Nudger lay and stared at the lofty canvas ceiling. He knew that the rumor of trouble in Swat was more than an idle story concocted for his benefit—the newspapers told him that—and he also knew that

the sepoy whose friend he had shot was the same Mian Gul who was now trying desperately to get the upper hand there.

Suppose the regiment did go to Swat! Well, he'd show these mean, sarcastic blighters that he could be of some use, that he wasn't afraid. Wasn't he an Englishman? Didn't Britannia rule the waves? Well!

He started to whistle "Rule Britannia".

"Shut yer 'ead and go to sleep," a peevish voice admonished.

WITH two battalions of Indian infantry and the usual complement of mountain batteries, machine guns, supply and transport, medical service and the rest of it, the Midlands sat down under the shadow of Fort Malakand, preparatory to making an entrance into the Swat valley.

For Mian Gul had been guilty of insurrection in British India, since his obscure valley lay within the confines of the Northwest Frontier Province.

Nudger Cooper, Jenkins, Plank and the others—all were present. The expedition afforded Nudger's tormentors with an unending series of opportunities for "telling Nudger off". These culminated the night before the troops were to march in, when Nudger was handed a note, purporting to be from Mian Gul himself:

> Dear Mr. Nudger Cooper:
>
> How are you, pal? Seems a long time since I seen you. Listen, pal, have you had a chance to try any of our tea yet? I want you to be sure and come and see me and have tea with me and lets let bigones be bigones. Dont forget now I will expect you any day its convenyunt. Be sure and come.
>
> —MYANN GULL

"It's a fake," said Nudger. "I seen his name in the papers and 'e spells it different. Besides," he added darkly, looking at Jenkins, "I know this 'ere 'andwritin'!"

By now every one in the company, even the commander, shared the joke. The following morning, as the column was preparing to move off, a sergeant stepped up to Nudger.

"They're sendin' a message to Mian Gul," he said solemnly, "an' the captain wants to know 'ow you intend answerin' this letter you got from 'im."

There was a delighted shout of laughter, but Nudger didn't even smile.

"Tell 'im I say to go to 'ell!"

Chuckling, the sergeant started to move away.

"Shall I add, 'with your compliments'?" he asked, with mock politeness. "It's usual to add that, you know."

"That'll be fine," Nudger retorted sourly.

During the next few days there was not a great deal of time for further pleasantry. Although Swat is on the direct route to Chitral, the country is unbelievably rough.

The troops sweated through the heat of the days, constantly sniped at by invisible enemies. At night, exhausted, they lay like dead men. Some of those unfortunate enough to be detailed for picket duty were rushed in the darkness and killed. In short, it was a typical frontier expedition.

South of Mankia the ever-retreating forces of Mian Gul, augmented by those of their late enemies, the contending mollahs, made a determined stand. Here the valley narrowed and the nature of the surrounding hills made it impossible for the British to outflank their opponents. Under cover of the guns of the mountain batteries and the machine guns, a picked party of the Midlands attempted to carry the position.

Unhappily, the barrage was not dense enough to hold down the Swati fire. But with traditional gallantry the Midlands kept on, fully realizing the hopelessness of the task. All but decimated, the brave remainder, by sheer dash, finally carried the *sangar* behind which Mian Gul's men were entrenched. But they were speedily overcome and some were captured alive.

Immediately a strong rescuing party

set out, for the assault and the final capture of his men had been closely observed through field glasses by the brigadier commanding.

The valley was a veritable funnel of death. The British, unable to advance in open order, made an easy target. The brigadier saw the futility of further slaughter and signaled the second party to retire.

And now the British were confronted with the problem of carrying a seemingly impregnable position, and doing it at once, if they were to save their captured comrades from the inevitable torture and mutilation which is the fate of captives on the frontier. Even now it might be too late.

Night fell, and the staff invited officers commanding units to attend a hurried council of war.

"Gentlemen," asked the harassed brigadier, "what, in your opinion, are the chances of carrying that *sangar* under cover of darkness?"

A silence followed. The group stared gloomily into space. The chances of a successful attack were practically nil—and they knew it.

"Come," said the brigadier, "I am asking for an expression of opinion." He turned to the colonel of the Midlands. "You, Singer—let's hear what you have to say. Your battalion has borne the brunt of today's fighting, and the men captured are yours. What do you suggest?"

Colonel Singer started to reply, when a loud argument arose outside the tent.

"Find out what that unholy row is about, will you?" asked the brigadier of his aide.

It seemed that a party of Swatis, bearing a flag of truce, had brought in a message.

"Let me have it," said the brigadier eagerly. "This may alter the complexion of the matter."

He sat down and read for some minutes. As he progressed, he gradually turned a brilliant shade of purple. He leaped to his feet and stormed up and down the narrow confines of the tent, casting an immense, genie-like shadow on the wall. Then he stopped and faced the group of officers.

"This is the damndest effrontery I ever heard of!" he cried angrily. "Why, the fellow's actually dictating terms to me!"

He stepped close to a lantern.

"Here's a rough translation—near enough, anyway:

"To the Officer Commanding:

By now you know that you can not dislodge me from the *sangar*. If you still doubt this, I shall welcome further attacks.

At present I hold nine of your men, all of the Midland Regiment; as yet they are unharmed. I have a score to settle with a private of this regiment, who is not among those taken. He is the one who shot my companion at the Kabuli Gate.

If this man is with you, I will exchange the nine men for that one. I am sending nine of my men with this letter, to be held by you as hostages until the exchange has been made.

However, should the man I want either be dead or not present, I shall expect a safe conduct for my men, under the flag of truce by which they go to you.

But no matter what you do with my men, unless the man I want is here before dawn, the prisoners will meet the customary fate of Unbelievers. If you attack in the dark, they will be done away with instantly.

A GENERAL turns to fiction! You recall Rafael de Nogales' brilliant articles published in ADVENTURE under the title "Memoirs of a Soldier of Fortune." Now this world-famous character—general in the Turkish army during the World War, and before that cowboy, prospector, secret agent, leader in numerous Central American revolutions, explorer and scholar—returns to our pages with a sparkling tale of the wild Kurdish tribes that he knows so well from his own experience in the Near East. Don't miss "Gold Teeth and the Morning Star"!

Let the one I seek come up the valley with a lighted lantern.

—MIAN GUL"

The brigadier finished reading and glanced about him.

Colonel Singer ran his tongue over dry lips.

"You asked for my opinion awhile back," he said. "Obviously, Mian Gul expects a night attack—is on the alert for it. The element of surprise is lacking and the chance of success now even smaller." He sighed. "Dawn," he concluded significantly, "is only a few hours away."

The brigadier stared at him.

"Do I understand you to imply, then, that you would send this man of yours up the valley as Mian Gul suggests?"

"Nine for one, and no other possible way to help those poor devils? Certainly I would!"

"But are you sure the man is here, that he wasn't killed or wounded today?"

Colonel Singer shook his head.

"It happens that I saw the company rolls just before coming here. Cooper's name—er—stood out, because I've had him in mind since that shooting affair. Oh, yes, he's available."

The brigadier considered.

"Damn it all, Singer," he said finally, "the thing isn't—well, it isn't British. It's the fortune of war that your men have been captured. How on earth can you justify sending a man deliberately to his death, even granting he would be saving nine others?"

"I wouldn't order him to go. I'd get him here and explain, then leave the decision up to him. He's an Englishman, sir, and a soldier—and I'm told he's anxious to atone for the shooting in Peshawar. I'll bank on Cooper!"

There was a murmur of approval.

"In view of the conditions in this message, what you suggest seems the only feasible plan, for the moment. Do you other gentlemen agree?" asked the brigadier.

Very obviously they did.

For a moment the brigadier thought deeply. Then he raised his eyes.

"Send for Cooper," he said.

ROUTED out of his blankets and hustled along to headquarters, Nudger came into the relative glare of many lanterns and blinked more owlishly than ever. He was firmly convinced that this was some further hoax, yet surprised that such high officers would bother with the thing. He soon sensed, however, that these officers were in deadly earnest. He stood loosely at attention, his eyes wandering over the gathering in a puzzled way.

"Cooper," said his colonel, "tonight you have the chance of doing one of the finest, most unselfish things ever done by a British soldier. I'm going to tell you the circumstances, then leave the decision up to you. And I know you aren't going to fail me!"

Rapidly the colonel told him the situation. As he listened, Nudger's heart and stomach began playing him strange tricks. In a voice that quavered, despite his efforts to control it, he asked an inevitable question—

"What w-would 'e be doin' to me, sir, when I got there?"

Colonel Singer looked at him kindly.

"I'm afraid," he said, "he will attempt to kill you in the most painful way he knows. But, Cooper, while there's life there's always hope—silly though it may sound to you at this moment."

All at once Nudger felt that the whole thing was a hideous nightmare. He wasn't really standing before this tentful of grim faced officers in this godforsaken spot, being asked to give up his life that others might live. It couldn't be. This was just a horrible dream he was having, brought on by all his wondering about being brave.

Well, if it was a dream, he'd act the way he hoped he might in real life. He took a deep breath and looked the colonel full in the eyes.

"I'll go, sir!"

Immediately it seemed more like a dream than ever, for all the officers were on their feet, cheering. Cheering, quite obviously, for him. He stood there, blinking at them, and presently the brigadier and his colonel shook hands with him. It *was* a dream!

"Here, my boy," the colonel was saying, "you'll take this lantern and walk straight up the valley. We'll see that the pickets pass you out. You can start at once, just as you are. Good luck and God bless you."

Nudger took the lantern and started for the tent door. The last impression he had was of all the officers, red tabs and all, standing very straight and still, as if at attention. He stepped into the darkness of the night; he heard some one ordering the pickets to pass him through. And it seemed in no time at all that he was clear of the lines and walking up the valley.

The sudden departure—and now the eery stillness all about him, broken only by the rattle of stones which he dislodged—everything seemed to add to the sense of unreality.

He carried the lantern in his right hand, and it swung to and fro as he walked along. His shadow, now long, now short, leaped drunkenly against huge boulders; sometimes his legs, unbelievably tall, seemed to race on up the valley ahead of him. He kept on, casting these absurd, dream-like fragments of shadows about him.

Like a sleepwalker's, his feet seemed to move without conscious volition. He was guided by the narrowness of the valley. Strangely, he had no feeling of fear; no sense of the sands of time running low—of any time whatever. After a bit it seemed as if the valley moved. He was standing still. A black-and-gold, incredible treadmill he was on, a treadmill of crazy shadows, a moving panorama of monotony.

Then, without warning, figures were all about him—noiseless figures which fell in beside him. The lantern was snatched from him and extinguished. No word was spoken. Two men grasped his arms and hurried him along. Now he could see nothing. He stumbled on heavily, half carried by those beside him.

At last there was a sensation of sharply rising ground, and the party turned off to the right. The footing became rougher and rougher. He was guided around a large rock, and suddenly his feet sank into loose, rapidly sloping shale. They traversed this, frequently slipping and sliding down. Little avalanches were started, which moved off down the slope, gathering more and more shale as they traveled, their rush swelling in volume until lost in the distance below.

Unexpectedly the shale slope ended, and Nudger felt smooth, level stone beneath his feet. This led to stone steps, cut into the face of the mountain. As they ascended there came to Nudger the wheeling, light feeling of being in a high, unprotected place.

Presently the steps turned into the mountain itself. They went up and up, endlessly; it was easier to see, for the lantern had been relighted. Long before they reached the top, Nudger's heart was pounding against his ribs as if it would burst.

At last they turned into a sort of grotto. This had been broken through on the cliff side and the hole cemented around to make a good sized window. The place was dimly lighted by flares.

Then, for the first time, one of those who had brought him spoke. The words were unintelligible to Nudger, but he gathered that he was to wait. He walked to the window, or rather, aperture, for it was perfectly open. Vaguely he could make out the general outlines before him.

He was apparently in a small side valley, high up and directly above the sloping shale which had been crossed not long before. Across the little valley the hills were much lower; beyond them Nudger could look straight down the main valley to where many pin-points of light marked the British camp.

He was startled by a voice at his elbow. It was Mian Gul.

"So," said the Swati, a note of triumph in his voice, "they sending you? It is good. I sending other men back now."

He clapped his hands. A henchman appeared. Mian Gul spoke rapidly for a moment; the man salaamed and disappeared.

The Swati turned to Nudger.

"Yes, very happy seeing you. Letting you have nice time here—oh, very nice time. You see?" He grinned evilly.

Now for the first time Nudger sensed impending disaster. It was no longer a dream. Some intense quality in Mian Gul's broken English made Nudger's flesh creep. There was no mistaking the sinister purpose behind the man's harmless words. All at once Nudger was very much afraid.

Through the aperture came the faintest suggestion of thinning darkness. Dawn was close at hand. The phrase "shot at sunrise" began to pound senselessly through Nudger's head. Shot at sunrise? He knew it would be nothing so merciful as that. "While there is life, there's hope. It's silly . . ."

He stood there trembling, rapt, when suddenly the idea came to him—a grim, desperate idea that awoke him to reality. Without hesitation he walked boldly to the opening, beckoning Mian Gul as he did so.

"Look," he said, pointing, "is that the light of the British fires 'way down there?"

Unconsciously Mian Gul stepped closer. Nudger caught him in a crude but effective headlock. He swung the Swati off his feet and toward the sill, but at the last minute the other braced his feet and strove to break out of the hold. Nudger managed to get his fingers firmly locked at last. He increased the pressure. The Swati gave a strangled cry, but no one came.

He reached for a knife stuck in his belt, for his hands were unobstructed. He managed to free the knife and stabbed down at Nudger's legs. With a cry of pain, Nudger whirled Mian Gul clear over the sill and loosed his hold. But, quick as light, with his free hand Mian Gul seized Nudger by the hair. The dead weight of the man's body pulled Nudger forward. Slowly, surely, he felt his feet slipping.

Mian Gul stabbed at him suddenly—and missed.

Nudger made one last, desperate effort to get a grip on something—anything. Then they were falling, turning over slowly in the air.

As they struck the shale Nudger was on top. The sharp slope picked them up instantly and they slid downward in a rapidly accumulating mass, the pace ever faster.

For a split second Nudger lost consciousness, and in that instant he and Mian Gul separated. Like a waterfall the shale cascaded over a small precipice; then, twisting in some unseen channel, it roared out upon the floor of the main valley and came to a stop.

His nose and ears clogged with dust, for awhile Nudger could see and hear nothing. He could feel blood spurting from a hundred places where the sharp stones had cut his flesh. His clothes had been ground to nothing. As he regained his sight and hearing, Nudger looked about him in the graying darkness. Mian Gul was nowhere to be seen. Small quantities of shale were still descending.

Then, in a moving pile headed directly for him, Nudger saw the outstretched hands of his enemy. The body was sliding face down, much as a bather coasts to the beach on the crest of a wave. Some of the shale piled against Nudger and he grasped a passing leg.

He pulled Mian Gul to him and turned the body over. He bent close to the face and detected the queer, wry twist of the head which indicates a broken neck.

Nudger looked back up the slope, but the bend into the side valley obscured his view of the opening from which they had fallen. Nor could he hear anything

which might indicate that his escape had been detected. Perhaps the Swatis were too accustomed to the sound of the sliding shale to pay any attention.

He rose to his feet, and a few steps carried him off the shale and out upon firm ground. His knees buckled under him. He all but fell. He felt weak and shaken and he longed for a drink. The river! Coming up the valley he had never given it a thought. He made his way to it and plunged his head gratefully into its icy coldness. And he drank. He rose, feeling immeasurably better.

There was no time to be lost. It was growing light. He must not be found in this vicinity. He broke into a staggering, shambling trot. Far back in his brain the exultant thought began to take form that he had at last met danger like a man. He found new strength to carry on, to overcome the growing desire to fall down and go to sleep.

SENTRIES of the British outposts spied a strange figure approaching. At a distance it looked like that of a native, colored gray; as it drew nearer it was seen to have curious brown patches everywhere on the almost naked body. The head hung low and the arms swung loosely and aimlessly. The figure staggered on, straight into the center of an amazed picket, where it tripped awkwardly over some slight obstruction and toppled weakly to the ground.

"It's a white man!" they said, in awed voices.

It happened that Colonel Singer was having an early morning look-see. He spied the group about the prostrate figure and walked over to see what the trouble was.

He looked. He looked again, this time more closely.

"Do you know who this is?" he asked.

None of the picket seemed to know.

"It's Private Cooper, Midland Regiment!"

All the men knew that name from the affair in Peshawar, but as yet the true significance of Cooper's journey up the valley was not generally realized.

One of the picket spoke up—

"Excuse me, sir, but what's he doing here, like this?"

Said the colonel:

"He's here like this because he's the bravest man I've ever known. And when he's rested up and well enough he's going to wear a Victoria Cross for the rest of his life!"

They picked Nudger up with new respect and started to carry him off to field hospital.

He opened his eyes.

"Am I back?" he asked weakly.

The colonel grasped his hand.

"Miraculously, you are, although I don't understand how. No matter—all that later."

"Sir," said Nudger, as the colonel walked along beside him, "if you want to know, this 'ere Mian Gul is dead. I had a fight with 'im and broke his neck."

The colonel started.

"Dead, you say? Why, that makes all the difference! Without his leadership these people will collapse like a pricked balloon. That's great news, Cooper. But you mustn't talk too much now. Is there anything I can do for you? I'd be happy."

Nudger closed his eyes wearily and thought for a moment.

"Well, sir," he said at last, "if it ain't too much trouble, you might give a message to Jenkins, of my platoon."

"Indeed I will," said the colonel warmly. "What do you want me to tell him?"

Nudger opened his eyes for an instant, glanced at the colonel, then closed them again. A beatific smile suffused his shale-scarred features.

"Please tell 'im, sir, that I accepted Mian Gul's invitation to tea and drank all 'e 'ad. That's all. Jenkins'll understand!"

THE CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

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A new voice rising unexpectedly in the Camp-Fire, and presiding forthwith over these informal councils without preliminary or announcement, must inevitably be a little hard put to render adequate accounting.

The voice, that is, and the accounting, of a new editor.

The notice is very short, and the company here gathered formidable indeed. But the voice is not wholly new. It has risen here before, if mostly from the outer fringes of the fireglow, and infrequently. It is quite some time now since I first of all spoke up in Camp-Fire as a recruit in the Writers' Brigade, to relate according to venerable custom the few facts about myself that might be pertinent here. I'll not go into that again.

But some of you will perhaps require no exhaustive accounting. They will perhaps remember Everybody's, *which flourished as a companion to* Adventure *for awhile, sponsored by the same publishers, and which it was my keen pleasure to supervise as editor. Or perhaps they will remember certain contributions to* Adventure *and occasional paragraphs in these very pages. A good number will remember many letters and encounters—letters touching every quarter of the country; encounters fortuitous and companionable these past few years along the ways and byways of a scattering of States between the two oceans, and afloat upon the two as well. The Camp-Fire is a bond, and the comrades many and widespread.*

No, the voice is not too strange, nor the editor too new.

The real accounting is to come. It will come with the issues delivered into your hands in the months ahead. I offer for the present simply a pledge. That this magazine, which has always been so peculiarly your own, will only be the closer to its readers, the firmer in its hold on their loyalty and affections, the finer in every way possible. That Adventure, *close now to a quarter century of preeminence in its field, shall go on only to greater achievement.*

I do not see how it can do otherwise.

A READER comments on the use of poisons in fiction in general, and in Allan Vaughan Elston's recent story ("The Shanghaied Ship," December issue) in particular:

Boston, Massachusetts

As an unwearied listener on the outer circle of Camp-fire comrades, I enjoyed particularly Elston's "The Shanghaied Ship." His use of the ancient sleeping-potion theme stirred me to make a few observations on this ever-popular way of captivating the imagination of the reader. From the classical tales of Arabian magic to the realms of pulp-wood paper stories one finds innumerable plots based on the effects of drugs that produce instantaneous sleep, or a hypnotic state, or amnesia, or a number of other interesting phenomena. Unfortunately, none of these has yet been made available to the medical profession, to whom they would be a great boon.

While certain barbituric acid derivatives come as close as any drugs to the hypothetical one in this story, there are none which could safely be administered in such varying dosage as must have happened under these circumstances, or which could have produced such consistent results even if all the victims had received the same

dose. Furthermore, an aqueous solution would be detected by taste, even supposing the drug to be readily soluble in water, as is seldom the case. The idea that the drug acts slowly is an improvement on most of the writers, who make their potions take effect instantly; however, all known narcotics leave the patient with loss of memory for events just preceding the lapse into unconsciousness, so that the engineer could hardly have remembered the actions of *Pomeroy*.

These minor inaccuracies do not in the least detract from the interest of the story, which takes its place with the rest of the December issue to make a remarkably entertaining number. Let's have more of the same to beguile away the long winter evenings. —PAUL E. SMITH

FURTHER sidelights on the Civil War: notes sent in by Gordon Young to accompany his serial, "When the Bravest Trembled", Part IV of which appears in this issue:

Uprising of Slaves

Some North zealots hoped for a slave insurrection. Gen. Butler, "Butler's Book," 212, says he was rebuked by Gov. Andrews of Massachusetts, at the beginning of the war for not aiding slave insurrection in Maryland. Pollard, ii, p. 306, footnote quotes from "an abolitionist pamphlet" giving a debate in the Senate of Pennsylvania: "Were I commander-in-chief, by virtue of the war powers and in obedience to the customs of civilized nations, I would confiscate every rebel's property, whether upon two legs or four, and I would give to the slave who would bring me his master's disloyal scalp one hundred and sixty acres of his master's plantation." The only outrages charged to negroes by Pollard are when they were led by Union officers. Slaves in great numbers did join invading armies as camp-followers, for the most part because (according to Gen. Wilson) they thought liberty was a state of well fed idleness; but often found the Yankee warmasters more cruel and abusive than their Southern owners.

Billy Wilson's Zouaves

"Billy Wilson's regiment was held up for a long time in New York as an inimitable scarecrow to the South. . . . It was related that Billy Wilson marched the companies into the hall and spacious barroom of the hotel and issued the order 'Attention.' Attention was paid, and the bystanders preserved silence. 'Kneel down,' shouted the colonel. The men dropped upon their knees. 'You do solemnly swear to cut off the head of every damned secessionist you meet during the war.' 'We swear,' was the universal response. 'The gallant souls,' said a New York paper, 'then returned in good order to their quarters.'" ("Pollard's History," I, p. 73.) The Comte de Paris, who served for a time on McClellan's staff, in his "History of the Civil War in America," I, p. 178, wrote: "It was observed that the average of crime in the great city of New York decreased by one-half after the departure of the Wilson Zouaves."

Bull Run

Sherman said, "Both armies were fairly defeated, and whichever had stood fast, the other would have run." ("Memoirs," I, p. 182.) Grant had the opinion that during the crisis of a battle both sides were likely to seem defeated, and that at such a time the one which assumed the offense was sure to win. (Sherman's "Memoirs," I, p. 245.) Gen. Johnston, distrusting his own raw troops, thought it best to let the raw troops of the Federals attack. "The Northern Army had the disadvantage, a great one to such undisciplined troops as were engaged on both sides, of being the assailants, and advancing under fire to attack, which can be well done only by trained soldiers." ("Narrative of Military Operations," by Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, p. 50.) The Black Horse Cavalry became a bugaboo to the Union soldiers at Bull Run, and long remained a bugaboo. ("Butler's Book," p. 291.) Union soldiers had been told to make a bold appearance at Bull Run and Rebels would flee. (Sherman's "Memoirs," I, p. 181.) Confederate accounts say Sherman's attack threw them into confusion at Bull Run. (Hart's "Sherman," p. 87.)

IN KEEPING with old custom, and in keeping with the emotions engendered by the passing of a comrade, we pause for a moment to mark the death of Robert Simpson, one of the Old Guard of the Writers' Brigade. Robert Simpson died in New York on January 7th at the age of 47 following a long and courageous fight that proved unavailing.

Born in Strathy, Scotland, Robert Simpson came in 1907 from the palm-oil trade in Africa to this country and to distinction in the writing craft. He wrote many stories for *Adventure* during a period of more than ten years. Two of the most popular of his many novels, "The Gray Charteris" and "Calvert of Allobar", first appeared in this magazine as serials. One of the last short stories he wrote is included by unforeseen coincidence in this very issue.

WHAT happens when a rifle explodes? Here's a letter from an ex-soldier who found out first-hand:

La Mesa, California

In reference to the questions asked by Quarto

Ojos in the April 1st, 1933 issue, and the answers given by Mr. R. M. Snyder in the July issue, 1933: I can furnish Quarto Ojos with all the information he needs on the explosion of at least one Army Springfield rifle, for I happened to be the unfortunate victim at the rear end of said rifle.

The incident happened at Guanajay, Cuba, in the winter of 1907-08 while we were engaged in target practice there. I was firing rapid-fire, 300 yards, from a sitting position. The rifle during the firing was not removed from the shoulder, and for that reason I know for a certainty that there was no foreign object in the barrel to cause such an explosion. Nevertheless the fifth and last bullet traveled only about half-way through the barrel. Then came the explosion, and believe me, it sure done things to me! It turned me over in a complete backward somersault. The small of the stock split and the jagged end came back and down, piercing the big under-arm muscle. The magazine floor-plate buried itself almost eighteen inches in the ground. Thank God it did not hit one of my legs in its downward path. The sides of the magazine bulged outward almost to a forty-five degree angle, thereby clamping the bolt fast, otherwise it might have come on back and torn the side of my head off, and I would not now be telling this tale. But I got plenty without that. My face was full of slivers of steel, and powder, and one piece of steel went through the right eye and is still in there.

I was afraid the accident might have made me gun-shy, so as soon as possible after I got out of hospital we went out to the range for a tryout. First shot at 200 yards up came the big white disc for a bull's-eye, and the old captain, who had slipped up behind me, slapped me on the shoulder and said, "Ah, hell, you're all right."

—W. M. KARTZMARK

P.S. By the way, the Ordnance Department never did figure out that one either.

A PERENNIAL point of contention crops up again: Do rattlesnakes shun the sun?

Daytona Beach, Florida

I notice in the last (December) issue of *Adventure* that Mr. Ibing doubted that rattlesnakes are sensitive to the direct rays of the sun. He is absolutely right; there is room for doubt, to say the least. Snakes, alligators and most other reptiles are cold-blooded; that is, their blood is below 90 degrees Far. in temperature. Heat does not affect them as it does warm-blooded animals. It would be just as reasonable, and as far from the truth, to claim that alligators are sensitive to the sun. My experience with rattlesnakes, both the large diamond-back and the beautiful little ground-rattler, comes from years of residence on the east coast of Florida, and annual sojourns since—sometimes as far south as Cape Sable.

A common habit of the former reptile is to lie at full length in the hot sun, in open sandy places often, following cool mornings; also alongside of a log that crosses a trail, or on the edge of a jungle, or a thick saw palmetto clump. On several occasions I have seen them in such situations, apparently enjoying the genial sunshine, and I have no doubt that many others have noticed the same habit.

ON THE 20th of December, 1919, I was exploring the ocean beach on Key Biscayne, about eight miles south of Miami, Fla. I was really searching for the so-called Florida sea-beans that wash up in easterly blows, coming from the West Indies. The pretty souvenirs usually are cast up at highwater mark.

As I was passing near an open sandy spot, on the edge of the jungle, north of the old lighthouse, I nearly stepped on a diamond-back rattlesnake of enormous size. It was stretched at full length, in bright sunshine, evidently enjoying the warmth after a cool morning. Jumping back, I picked up a stick and threw it, hitting the snake, making it coil. Then I found a plank on the beach, with which I killed the largest rattlesnake I had ever encountered. It measured eight feet and five inches in length and four inches in diameter. I managed to kill it in about thirty minutes, being careful not to hit anywhere except on the head. I had it skinned in short order, and it now is mounted on red felt, and is on my cruiser *Buccaneer*, lying at Daytona Beach. If sunshine would kill a Florida rattlesnake, every specimen in the State would have died a million years or more ago!

—CAPT. CHAS. H. COE

FUNGOID growths on camera lenses:

New Westminster, B. C., Canada

In answer to the recent query in Ask Adventure about the removal of fungus on camera lenses, I wish to say that it's been my experience, and I believe it is well known by botanists, that any form of sulphur, or its fumes especially, is certain death to fungoid growths.

—W. J. NORMAN

MORE books on the Cattlemen's War in Wyoming:

Shoshoni, Wyoming

From time to time I have noted several references regarding the history of the Johnson County Raid, in the Camp-fire section. There was an attempt to suppress Mercer's history of the raid, but it was not very successful. Many copies of the original history were sold and they still exist. A few years ago Mr. E. A. Boots of Thermopolis, Wyoming, published a very good reprint of the original and the book can be obtained, well bound, for about $1.00. This was the first history of the event published. "Malcom Campbell, Sheriff" is another and in some ways better history of the event, though both are very partisan. Emerson Hough in his "Cowboy" has a very good

account of it, but likewise he is not impartial by a long ways. In fact no one as yet has written an impartial history of the whole affair. A. J. Mokler in his "History of Natrona County" came about being as disinterested as any one.

The above books contain best accounts of the whole business, though Mokler's history contains more of the aftermath of the trouble.

—EDWARD L. CRABB

DO YOU remember in the last issue some correspondence between Raymond S. Spears and William Wells, both members of our Ask Adventure staff, on the relative advantages of wild land reclamation as against conservation? It is not unusual that two of our experts should disagree on so debated a subject; and since it is, furthermore, one of national interest and importance, we are glad to give it additional space here. Mr. Wells replies:

Sisters, Oregon

Dear Mr. Spears:

Your answer to my inquiry sent through *Adventure* is at hand, and I agree with very few of your conclusions. It is perfectly true that much land is being farmed that would do better in its primitive state, but your figures on the amount of wild life that the land would support are altogether wrong. Even the well watered and fertile Atlantic coast could support a very limited population before the white men came, and the Indians depended largely on their cornfields. When General Sullivan with an American army invaded the country of the Six Nations and destroyed their cornfields and orchards as a punishment for their raids on the settlements the tribes, good hunters and well armed though they were, would have starved if the British had not fed them; many starved to death as it was. The same thing happened when General Wayne destroyed the fields of the Ohio tribes, starvation driving them to make peace.

I was in the short grass country—the best of the buffalo range—in the early seventies, when the buffalo were cleaned out and cattle took their place. The capacity of the range (Western Kansas and Nebraska, what is now Oklahoma, the Panhandle of Texas, etc.) short grass, buffalo grass country, was one animal to five acres, a little over one hundred head per square mile. About one-fifth to one-tenth (range cattle mature slowly) of the animals could be shipped as beef annually. Say fifteen head of beef, dressing out 600 pounds each, per square mile. At the outside 10,000 pounds of beef per square mile annually, which is some different from your estimate of 320,000 pounds of buffalo meat. And this was the best of the buffalo country; any amount of the range supporting only one animal to forty acres. And the short grass country now produces, year in and year out, something like eight bushels, or say five hundred pounds of wheat per year per acre, 320,000 pounds of food per square mile. Why, your estimate of the yield of buffalo meat per acre per year is more than the yield of buffalo grass, which was a short curly grass only a few inches, hardly ever four inches, high. It takes just as much grass to make a pound of buffalo meat as it does a pound of beef, and I never saw buffalo grass that would run over 500 pounds per acre, generally much less, and it takes about fifty pounds of wild vegetation to make a pound of flesh.

HERE is another point: On the plains buffalo bones lasted; the smaller ones, for years; the massive leg bones twenty to twenty-five; the skulls sometimes a hundred. I have seen buffalo skulls picked up in Central Oregon recently where there have certainly been no buffalo for over a hundred years—the Indians say for two hundred. The Indians generally simply cut the meat from the bones of the buffalo that they killed, never taking the head, the white trappers the same. The skin hunters left the carcass where it fell; hunting for market didn't amount to much. According to your figures the skulls of all the buffalo killed during a hundred years should have dotted the plains, many to the acre. I was there before picking up buffalo bones and shipping them east became a business, and I never saw anywhere skulls even one to the acre, 640 to the square mile, except where for years the Indians had made surrounds, or where the skin hunters had made a stand.

All wild life—the amount, that is—depends on vegetation, and bad lands have little, which is why they are called bad lands. Fifty pounds per acre would be a liberal estimate for the average bad land, which would produce a pound of flesh per acre, flesh or fowl, anything from rodents to antelope. A coyote needs about a pound of food, a day, and they destroy more than that—the nests of game birds, young birds and rabbits, fawns of antelope, lambs, everything, three to four hundred pounds of food to produce a coyote pelt worth at present prices three to four dollars. 2,000 or more pounds of vegetation to produce the flesh that a coyote needs in a year, which would feed a ewe and her lamb. The ewe is worth at present six dollars, her wool two dollars, her lamb three dollars, more than twice what the coyote was worth. It is true that during the depression sheep went to almost nothing and the banks lost money on them. But so did the banks lose money on real estate, metals, lumber, grain, stocks and pretty nearly everything.

IN ONE publication you have claimed that the State of Nevada would average fifty dollars per square mile in meat and furs. The greater part of Nevada is a desert and never had any wild life. When the first parties of white trappers crossed it from Salt they nearly starved, having to live on their horses. When the Lewis and Clark party came West they found no game between the Rockies and the coast, the Indians living on horses, dogs and fish. On the coast there was little game, the natives depending on fish, and the party had difficulty in finding enough elk to provide food for the winter.

When Dr. McLaughlin took charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's post of Fort Vancouver the first thing he did was to start farming and import

cattle, sheep and hogs so that the company's men wouldn't starve. When Peter Skene Ogden explored what is now Eastern Oregon for the company, his party, experienced hunters and trappers, nearly starved—no deer, no anything but here and there a few beaver. When Frémont went through the country the story was the same—no game. There is more wild life in Oregon right now than there ever was; it is well protected, and right up to the limit that the range will support.

YOUR claim that Oregon could produce $4,000,000 of fur a year instead of the $250,000 now is nonsense. There is only a short open season on fur; trappers are licensed, must work under the supervision of the forest and game officials. But the fur does not increase, because their food supply is limited. As it is, coyotes and other animals destroy a large amount of game birds and their eggs and young, fawns of deer, etc. In deer country a cougar kills at least a deer a week—2,500 pounds of venison to keep an animal the pelt of which is almost worthless. I am somewhat of an old-timer myself, and I have camped with plenty of men whose trapping experiences went back to Bonneville, Sublett, Fitzpatrick (Broken Hand) and the like, and never heard of any one eating cougar except in a pinch. Why, my cougar hounds would almost starve before they would eat the rank smelling and tasting stuff!

Deer shot ahead of dogs are unfit for consumption. The animal is over-heated, the flesh is gorged with blood and does not drain well, and would be condemned by any sanitary inspector. It is illegal to run deer with dogs in any Western State—was in Dakota in 1920-24. I am familiar with the Bad Lands of Dakota, was fifty years ago, and there never was any fur there but coyotes and bobcats. My gosh, the idea of there being cross-fox, mink, otter and muskrats in bad lands where water was blamed scarce—practically desert!

I TRAPPED in the Rockies fifty years ago when the fur, except beaver, was as plentiful as ever, and I never saw a trap line in good fur country that would yield more than ten dollars a mile—a thousand dollars for a hundred mile line covering at least a hundred square miles. Nor has any fur country, except good beaver water, ever yielded anything like what you claim. I am blamed sceptical about your California trapper that took $6,000 worth of fur a season. That couldn't be done on good beaver water, let alone land animals. One man couldn't look after enough traps and take care of the fur from the catch.

As regards the Klamath swamps, the drained lands are very productive and official evidence to that effect has been forwarded to *Adventure*. In potatoes they yield (average) 125 to 160 sacks per acre, some yields running as high as 250 sacks. At only 100 sacks per acre, that is 3,200 tons of food per square mile. It would take a lot of muskrats and ducks to equal that, especially as muskrat pelts are only worth an average price now of forty-five cents, instead of the $4.50 a pelt that you claim. Potatoes are now selling in the field at $1.00 to $1.25 per sack. Figure out the cash value per square mile yourself. And the Klamath country will ship this year 3,500 cars of potatoes.

In Eastern Oregon and Washington, the same country where Lewis and Clark and later explorers had to live on horses and dogs, there is now stacked in the fields because the warehouses can hold no more, forty million bushels of wheat, that the Government is preparing to ship abroad and sell for what it will bring, just to keep it from rotting. And the warehouses (cold storage) of the Pacific Coast are jammed to the doors with butter, eggs, poultry, meats of all kinds, for which there is little or no sale.

—WILLIAM WELLS

FROM the foregoing, it certainly looks as if the fur is flying! I am reminded of two homesteaders I sat down and talked with last year in Arizona while passing through.

The first of the pair, after failing in business in Phoenix, staked a claim in the Salt River Valley in 1926 with $30 in his pocket and a growing family on his hands. Today he is putting two sons through college, has a nice home and car and all the comfortable fixin's. Irrigation and citrus groves turned the trick. The other, in a different part of the State, has no irrigation as yet and buys his water for one cent per gallon—but he was so enthusiastic he wrote down the address of the land office in Phoenix so I could hurry and file a claim for myself and get in on such a good thing. He didn't look starved by any means, though he was out in the middle of more arid desert than I could believe in all at once.

I'll never argue with an expert. But I felt a twinge of wistful envy, talking to those fellows. Arizona's a great little State, coming along fast. Along with citrus fruits and long-staple cotton, it's got one of the finest crops of menfolk I've ever seen. It's been a constant temptation ever since to turn the old phrase around and say, "Go West, young woman!" I remember the cheerful, industrious young couple selling oranges I stopped and talked with. The girl was from Vermont. She had made her way out West hitch-hiking. There was no need of asking if she ever wished to go back. She was right where she aimed to stay.

—WILLIAM CORCORAN

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Horse

HOW to mount a rented horse so that the liveryman will not suspect you're a tyro.

Request:—"I would like to learn how to ride a horse correctly, but the stables around here won't let a beginner ride any of their horses without knowing a little something about them. I was wondering if I might not learn a little from you about how to mount a horse."

—FRANCIS JULIEN, Waterbury, Connecticut

Reply, by Major Thomas H. Dameron:—One thing interesting about riding is that one never learns all there is to know about it, so a little patience and lots of experience will make 'most any one an accomplished rider.

Mounting a horse in the Army is done exactly and by the numbers. The closer we follow the same in civilian life the more nearly correct we are. Face yourself to the left (near) side of your horse about one foot or closer to him and your left leg slightly to rear of his foreleg. Gather the reins in the left hand, the right hand resting on the pommel, next take the reins in the right hand (still on pommel) with the left adjust your stirrup to your left foot; (if you evince trouble reaching the stirrup with your foot, with a gentle horse you can turn slightly to the left raise the stirrup out along his neck and place your foot in it with slight flexing of your knee); again take the reins in the left hand, resting it on the withers or the pommel, place the right hand on the cantle and raise yourself slowly and steadily until you stand in the stirrup (much practice and you will not have to "jump"), hesitate a moment in this position to balance your weight, then throw your right leg over and take your seat.

With the cow pony and Western saddle you can face to rear of horse, turn the stirrup around to your foot, grab the horn with one or both hands, and swing or vault up in the saddle.

Grizzly

HE LIKES to charge downhill. Shoot him through the shoulder and he is yours.

Request:—"This Summer I expect to prospect for gold in northeast California, in the region of the Klamath River, also the Smith River in Del Norte County and the American and Feather Rivers in counties ranging north from Mariposa and Plumas. I am a little worried about the possibility of wild animals attacking me, my dog or my burro at night. Just what is necessary for safety?

What firearms would you recommend? I have been in the Navy and am a fair shot, but I would not know where to aim at a grizzly. Would you keep a camp-fire going all night?"

—GEORGE FREND, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—I doubt if you will have trouble with wild (predatory) animals. Cougars or mountain lion, wildcats and even wolves at the present time, have (except in very exceptional cases) too great a fear of man to cause you worry from attack. The same can not be said for grizzly bears. It is generally conceded that the original California grizzly is now extinct. It was probably much larger and more addicted to unprovoked attack than any

other Ursus horribilis. Although the present day grizzly as encountered in the mountain region of the West is not an animal to be trifled with or ignored, yet it is doubtful if it will go out of its way to attack a man or a camp at night.

I am speaking now only of those generally encountered in their natural wild state. The above does not apply to those grizzlies found in Yellowstone Park, which have become used (more or less) to man, and which have been known even quite recently to attack people and camps when entirely unprovoked. Grizzly bears when cornered or when met under circumstances that cause the bear to feel it is cornered, will not hesitate to attack.

Generally speaking, a grizzly will, on scenting a man, sneak off in an effort to make his getaway without being seen. I have spent most of my lifetime in the mountains of the West, and most of that time in country where grizzly bears were more or less common. I have heard many tales of attack by grizzlies, and particularly of meeting one that would not give a traveler the trail. I have never met such a bear. I have never seen a grizzly if unmolested offer to attack.

When being hunted, and wounded, or when caught in a trap, this bear is particularly dangerous. More so if the bear is on the uphill side of one. The danger is much less when you are above the bear. My experience has taught me that a grizzly will charge more readily downhill than up. In fact, unless forced to do so, I very much doubt if I would shoot at a grizzly bear that was directly uphill or nearly so above me, whether in or out of a trap. I feel quite confident that one may go anywhere in the mountains of the West entirely unarmed, and be unmolested by the wild life found there. Yet I would not choose to do so.

IF YOU propose to actually spend the season in prospecting for gold you will have little time to hunt bear or anything else, and it is an even bet that you will not see a bear. What little hunting you will do will be strictly for meat, and then you can hunt only in season. That is, during the open season when hunting is permitted in California.

I believe it is correct to state that deer are the only game animals one is permitted to hunt in that State, excepting bear. All predatory animals such as lion, coyote, wolves, etc. can be shot at any time. Since you are going light, and in case you are not fast and accurate with a six-shooter, and also if you are not overburdened with cash, I would advise forgetting taking a revolver of any description with you.

I would advise taking a Winchester carbine .30-.40 if you can get one. If not, then a .30-30. If you are a good shot, the latter is plenty heavy for deer, and anything else up to a grizzly. It is too light both as to weight and charge for bear.

A bear should be shot through the shoulders or the neck. The latter only if the hunter is a sure shot. A bear shot through the body back of the point of the shoulder will travel for miles, and after the first few jumps will usually bleed little or not at all. Hitting direct through the shoulders, neck or any point along the backbone will break a bear down so that he can not travel, and he is yours.

The frontal bones of a grizzly skull are sloping, and many old-timers will tell you never to aim between the eyes or above in shooting a grizzly head-on. It is probably true that a bullet placed there will often glance off and not penetrate the skull. On the other hand, I have seen a grizzly shot with a .30-40 and he never moved after being hit. The skull was smashed in many places. So that's that.

Yes, a fire will keep wild animals away at night; though after a few nights in the open, you will probably not bother to sit up and keep a fire going. Besides the loss of sleep, it takes a mighty lot of wood to keep said fire going, and after prowling around all day prospecting you will not feel much like working up a woodpile at night.

Don't lose any sleep over those bears. It just isn't done these days.

Parachute

A FULL 28-footer for a 210-pound man.

Request:—"1. If a man's weight is 210 pounds, how large should a parachute be in order to bring him down without injury sustained in landing?

2. Upon what basis is size of parachute determined, i. e. upon diameter or upon its depth?

3. Is the diameter based upon the spread of the parachute while in flight, as during descent, or is it based upon the dimensions given it by the designer?

4. Has a minimum rate of descent in feet per second been established?

5. What is the maximum rate of descent permissible, for safety in landing upon the ground?"
—J. J. COUGHLIN, New Haven, Connecticut

Reply, by Lieut. J. R. Starks:—1. A 210 lb. man should use the 28 ft. diameter chute, the one used by the Army for exhibition jumps, the pack-on-the-back chute. The 24 ft. seat-pack chute is rather small for a man that size.

2 and 3. Size based on diameter when chute is fully opened and stretched on the ground.

4. There was one instance where a chute was caught in an uprising convection current of warm air at Brooks Field, Texas, and the chute and its human passenger actually *rose* quite a few feet.

5. Rate of 22 feet per second is about as hard as a person wants to hit.

Diving Helmet

HOME-MADE outfits are dangerous —and may infringe on patents.

Request:—"I would like to know where plans for making a home-made diving helmet could be obtained."—JOSEPH MOORE, Auburn, New York

Reply, by Mr. Gerald T. White:—It is our belief that the diving hood such as you mention is covered by patents. In that case you would be liable for legal action if you made one yourself.

I have heard of men making their own outfits from the upper part of an ordinary hot-water boiler or even an old gasoline can. The boiler is cut off about 24 inches long and two semi-

circular openings for the shoulders are cut in the lower edges. An opening is cut for an eyepiece and an old boat portlight soldered in place. One pipe connection at the top of the boiler is left unplugged and is attached to a hand-driven, double-acting air pump by means of a hose.

It is my opinion that any such amateur-built rig would be quite dangerous, as it would seem that the success of the device rests a great deal upon the proper relationship of its weight to its buoyancy. The builders of the patented device are said to have spent a great deal of time perfecting the proportions.

Shark

CLEANING a jaw for exhibition.

Request:—"Would be greatly obliged to you if you would please let us know how to clean jaws of sharks and other fishes. We scrape them as well as we can, then dry them in the sun, but this is not sufficient, and we do not know which acids to use in order to get them as clean and white as they are in the museums."

—ROBERT FRIEDERICH, Havana, Cuba

Reply, by Mr. Seth W. Bullock:—You will find that the best way to clean them is to boil them until the flesh is easily removed. Care must be exercised, however, in case the shark is a young one, not to boil it too long, since if you do the ligaments to hinge the jaws will separate. The older the shark the less chance of spoiling it.

Talisman

FROM the Chinese Wall, a Hindu charm.

Request:—"I have an old coin which I found in a crevice in the Great Wall near Shanhaikuan. It is of white metal, but neither silver nor nickel. The size is just a little bigger than our quarter. The inscriptions are not in Chinese or old Chinese, according to Chinese scholars who profess to know. Several Chinese have offered me a good price for it and seem to consider it some kind of luck-piece. If possible to make anything out of the rubbings would you kindly let me know what it is?"—P. H. CHRISTIANSEN, Chinwangtao, China

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—The piece you write about as having been found in a crevice of the Great Wall of China is not a coin but a talisman made in India and for all I know sold there only. It illustrates scenes in the Hindu religion. It is rather interesting to find one of these tucked away in the Wall, but it could have been put there recently, as these pieces are not old; in fact are sold today. Now, that part of China, as you well know, has had many foreign troops in it during the past forty years. The piece was probably brought up by some English contingent from India, either British or native troops. The piece, as you surmised, is not silver but a poor alloy.

Alaska

FARMING near Fairbanks. Good land, but a long Winter.

Request:—"I know the trials of homesteading and dry farming here in western Dakota, have had some experience placer mining in the Black Hills and a great deal of experience trapping the fur bearers in these parts.

1. What would you consider the minimum amount of cash for one contemplating homesteading near Fairbanks, Alaska?

2. Is there any good land available within fifty miles of Fairbanks? What crops are raised? Is there any livestock raising in this vicinity? Is there any market for farm produce? Is this land timber or grass? Could one with a natural aptitude for hunting and trapping make enough to live on during the Winter?

3. Would there be any chance of one's locating a placer claim where he could make reasonable wages, within a radius of two hundred miles of Fairbanks, or has this country been thoroughly prospected?"

—GLENN STREETER, Folsom, South Dakota

Reply, by Mr. Theodore S. Solomons:—1. I consider five hundred dollars in your pocket when you get to Fairbanks with your personal possessions, but no grub or other supplies to speak of, the very minimum that any cautious, serious man should have, especially if he doesn't want to rely too much upon wage earning up there. A thousand is much better.

2. Yes, there is good land available within fifty miles of Fairbanks, but not the pick, naturally. There are no grass lands in Alaska except on the southwest coast. But throughout southern and central Alaska are many large meadows which can usually be farmed, especially for hay crops. The land in general that is suited for agriculture is moss covered and largely timbered, though not heavily. Clearing is almost always necessary, and burning the moss. There is not much market in Alaska, which is sparsely settled and too far from the States to warrant exporting produce. The market is the sticker, but people can live nicely on what they produce, in most cases. Of course they can dispose of some. Enough to buy what they don't produce. And fish and game help out.

You can get some pelts. You should go far afield, though. You are allowed five months off your homestead each year. Winter up there is from late October to early May. That is, the snow isn't off till then except on exposed places. Severe climate, but not stormy. And healthful.

3. No country as big as that can be said to be thoroughly prospected. You might engage in mining profitably right around Fairbanks. I never advise men to prospect. I consider it (after many years' knowledge) one of the worst of businesses, though "mining" is one of the best to the trained engineering-gifted man.

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A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears on page 126

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The expert will in all cases answer to the best of his ability, but neither he nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment. Ask Adventure covers outdoor opportunities, but only in the way of general advice.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

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Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

Yachting A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Place, Chicago, Ill.

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First Aid CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

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Camping and Woodcraft PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tennessee.

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Precious and Semi-precious Stones *Cutting and polishing of gem materials; technical information.*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Cal.

Forestry in the United States *Big-Game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and products. No questions on employment.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Box 575, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

Navy Matters, United States and Foreign—LT.-COMDR. VERNON C. BIXBY, U.S.N. (retired), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Florida.

U. S. Marine Corps CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, R. F. D. 1, Box 614, La Canada, California.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data schools; foreign activities; publications. Parachutes and gliders. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 174, Farmingdale, N. J.

Federal Investigative Activities *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 174, Farmingdale, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, 189-16 Thirty-seventh Avenue, Flushing, New York.

Horses *Care, breeding, training in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—MAJOR THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1709 Berkley Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *General information on reptiles and amphibians; their habits and distribution.*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ornithology *Birds; their habits and distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, New York, N. Y.

Stamps DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Old Songs that Men Have Sung ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 995 Pine St., San Francisco, California.

Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The New York Evening Post,* 75 West St., New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

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Archery EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Wrestling CHARLES B. CRANFORD, 35 E. 22nd St., New York City.

Boxing CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH.

Fencing CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, wages, duties, statistics and records of American shipping. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all government owned vessels.—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESEBERG, 47 Dick St., Rosemont, Alexandria, Va.

★**The Sea Part 2** *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

★**The Sea Part 3** *Atlantic and Indian Oceans: Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.) *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPTAIN DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Arizona, care of Conner Field.

★**New Guinea** L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands** WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, Box 197, Centerport, Long Island, N. Y.

★**Asia Part 2** *Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies in general, India, Kashmir, Nepal. No questions on employment.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 3 *Anam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin-China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 4** *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 6 *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., U. S. Veterans' Hospital, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Asia Part 7 *Japan.*—OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 8 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**Africa Part 1** *Egypt, Tunis, Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 2 *Abyssinia, French Somaliland, Belgian Congo. No questions on employment.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, care of *Adventure.*

Africa Part 3 (British) *Sudan, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya. No questions on employment.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, care of *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar: West Africa: Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—N. E. NELSON, Firestone Plantations Company, Akron, Ohio.

Africa Part 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal and Rhodesia.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, R. F. D. 1, Simi, Cal.

✠**Africa Part 8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada.

Madagascar RALPH LINTON, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

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